BROWNING AND HIS CENTURY

HELEN A CLARKE



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BROWNING AT 23 (LONDON 1835)

Browning and His Century

BY
HELEN ARCHIBALD CLARKE
Author of *"Browning's Italy," "Browning's England,"* etc.



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To

THE BOSTON BROWNING SOCIETY

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

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BROWNING AND HIS CENTURY

PROLOGUE

TO ROBERT BROWNING

"Say not we know but rather that we love,
And so we know enough." Thus deeply spoke
The Sage; and in men's stunted hearts awoke
A haunting fear, for fain are they to prove
Their life, their God, with yeas and nays that move
The mind's uncertain flow. Then fierce outbroke,—
Knowledge, the child of pain shall we revoke?
The guide wherewith men climb to things above?
Nay, calm your fears! 'Tis but the mere mind's knowing,
The soul's alone the poet worthy deeming.
Let mind up-build its entities of seeming
With toil and tears! The toil is but for showing
How much there lacks of truth. But 'tis no dreaming
When sky throbs back to heart, with God's love beaming.

I

THE BATTLE OF MIND AND SPIRIT

DURING the nineteenth century, which has already receded far enough into the perspective of the past for us to be able to take a comprehensive view of it, the advance guard of the human race found itself in a position entirely different from that ever before occupied by it. Through the knowledge of cosmic, animal, and social evolution gradually accumulated by the laborious and careful studies of special students in every department of historical research and scientific experiment, a broader and higher state of self-consciousness was attained. Mankind, on its most perceptive plane, no longer pinned its faith to inherited traditions, whether of religion, art, or morals. Every conceivable fact and every conceivable myth was to be tested in the laboratory of the intellect, even the intellect itself was to undergo dissection, with the result that, once for all, it has been decided what particular range of human knowledge lies within the reach of mental

perception, and what particular range of human knowledge can be grasped only through spiritual perception.

Such a momentous decision as this in the history of thought has not been reached without a long and protracted struggle extending back into the early days of Christianity, nor, it may be said, is the harmony as yet complete, for there are to-day, and perhaps always will be, human beings whose consciousness is not fully orbed and who either seek their point of equilibrium too entirely in the plane of mind or too entirely in the plane of spirit.

In the early days, before Christianity came to bring its "sword upon earth," there seems to have been little or no consciousness of such a struggle. The ancient Hindu, observing Nature and meditating upon the universe, arrived intuitively at a perception of life and its processes wonderfully akin to that later experimentally proved by the nineteenth century scientist, nor did he have a suspicion that such truth was in any way antagonistic to religious truth. On the contrary, he considered that, by it, the beauty and mystery of religion was immeasurably enhanced, and, letting his imagination play upon his intuition, he brought forth a theory of spiritual

evolution in which the world to-day is bound to recognize many elements of beauty and power necessary to any complete conception of religion in the future.

Even the Babylonians made their guesses at an evolutionary theory of the universe. Greek philosophy, later, was permeated with the idea, it having been derived by them perhaps from the Chaldeans through the Phœnicians, or if the theories of Aryan migrations be correct, perhaps through inheritance from a remote Aryan ancestry.

When Christian thought gained its hold upon the world, the account of creation given in Genesis became so thoroughly impressed upon the minds of men that it was regarded as the orthodox view, rooted in divine revelation, and to question it was to incur the danger of being called an atheist, with its possibly uncomfortable consequences of being martyred.

Strangely enough, the early Church adopted into its fold many pagan superstitions, such as a belief in witchcraft and in signs and wonders, as well as some myths, but this great truth upon which the pagan mind had stumbled, it would have none of.

These two circumstances — the adoption on the part of Christianity of pagan superstí-

tions and its utter repudiation of the pagan guesses upon evolution, carrying within it the germs of truth, later to be unearthed by scientific research — furnished exactly the right conditions for the throwing down of the gauntlet between the mind and the spirit. The former, following intellectual guidance, found itself coming more and more into antagonism with the spirit, not yet freed from the trammels of imagination. The latter, guided by imagination, continued to exercise a mythopœic faculty, which not only brought it more and more into antagonism with the mind, but set up within its own realm an internecine warfare which has blackened the pages of religious history with crimes and martyrdoms so terrible as to force the conviction that the true devil in antagonism to spiritual development has been the imagination of mankind, masquerading as verity, and not yet having found its true function in art.

Regarded from the point of view of the student of intellectual development, this conflict of two thousand years has the fascination of a great drama of which the protagonist is the mind struggling to free the spirit from its subjection to the evil aspects of the imagination. Great thinkers in the field of science, philosophy, and religion are the *dramatis*

personæ, and in the onward rush of this world-drama the sufferings of those who have fallen by the way seem insignificant.

But when the student of history takes his more intimate survey of the purely human aspects of the struggle, heartrending, indeed, become the tragedies resulting from the exercise of human bigotry and stupidity.

Indignation and sorrow take possession of us when we think upon such a spectacle as that of Roger Bacon, making ready to perform a few scientific experiments before a small audience at Oxford, confronted by an uproar in which monks, fellows, and students rushed about, their garments streaming in the wind, crying out, "Down with the magician!" And this was only the beginning of a persecution which ended in his teaching being solemnly condemned by the authorities of the Franciscan order and himself thrown for fourteen years into prison, whence he issued an old and broken man of eighty.

More barbarous still was the treatment of Giordano Bruno, a strange sort of man who developed his philosophy in about twenty-five works, some prose, some poetry, some dialogues, some comedies, with such enticing titles as "The Book of the Great Key," "The Explanation of the Thirty Seals," "The Ex-

pulsion of the Triumphant Beast," "The Threefold Minimum," "The Composition of Images," "The Innumerable, the Immense and the Unfigurable." His utterances were vague, especially to the intellects of his time, yet not so vague that theology, whether Catholic or Calvinistic, did not at once take fright.

He held that the investigation of nature in the unbiased light of reason is our only guide to truth. He rejected antiquity, tradition, faith, and authority; he exclaimed, "Let us begin by doubt. Let us doubt till we know." Acting upon these principles, he began to unfold again that current of Greek thought which the system imposed by the Church had intercepted for more than a thousand years, and arrived at a conception of evolution prefiguring the modern theories.

He conceived the law of the universe to be unceasing change. "Each individual," he declared, "is the resultant of innumerable individuals; each species is the starting point for the next." Furthermore, he maintained that the perfecting of the individual soul is the aim of all progress.

Tenets so opposite to the orthodox view of special creation and the fall of man could not be allowed to go unchallenged. It is to be

remembered that he was a priest in holy orders in the Convent of St. Dominic, and in the year 1576 he was accused by the Provincial of his order of heresy on one hundred and thirty counts. He did not await his trial, but fled to Rome, thence to northern Italy, and became for some years a wanderer. He was imprisoned at Geneva; at Toulouse he spent a year lecturing on Aristotle; in Paris, two years as professor extraordinary in the Sorbonne; three years in London, where he became the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, and influenced the philosophy of both Bacon and Shakespeare. Oxford, however, was unfriendly to his teachings and he was obliged to flee from England also. Then he wandered for five years from city to city in Germany — at one time warned to leave the town, at another excommunicated, at another not even permitted to lodge within the gates. Finally, he accepted the invitation of a noble Venetian, Zuane Mocenigo, to visit Venice and teach him the higher and secret learning. The two men soon quarreled, and Bruno was betrayed by the count into the hands of the Inquisition. He was convicted of heresy in Venice and delivered to the Inquisition in Rome. He spent seven years in its dungeons, and was again tried and convicted, and called

upon to recant, which he stoutly refused to do. Sentence of death was then passed upon him and he was burned at the stake on February 17, 1600, on the Campo de' Fiori, where there now stands a statue erected by Progressive Italy in his honor.

His last words were, "I die a martyr, and willingly." Then they cast his ashes into the Tiber and placed his name among the accused on the rolls of the Church. And there it probably still remains, for no longer ago than 1889, when his statue was unveiled on the ninth of June, on the site of his burning, in full view of the Vatican, Pope Leo XIII, it is said, refused food and spent hours in an agony of prayer at the foot of the statue of St. Peter. Catholic, and even Protestant, denunciation of Bruno at this time showed that the smoke from this particular battle in the war of mind with spirit was still far from being laid.

With the fate of Giordano Bruno still fresh in his mind, Galileo succumbed to the demands of the Inquisition and recanted, saying that he no longer believed what he, himself, with his telescope had proved to be true.

"I, Galileo, being in my seventieth year, being a prisoner and on my knees, and before your Eminences, having before

my eyes the Holy Gospel, which I touch with my hands, abjure, curse, and detest the error and the heresy of the movement of the earth."

If this recantation had brought any comfort or peace into his life it might have been hard to forgive Galileo's perjury of himself. His persecution, however, continued to the end. He was exiled from his family and friends, and, even when he had become blind and wasted by sorrow and disease, he was still closely watched lest he might utter the awful heresy that the earth moved.

A hundred years later than this, when Buffon attempted to teach the simple truths of geology, he was deposed from his high position and made to recant by the theological faculty of the Sorbonne. The man who promulgated geological principles, as firmly established to-day as that of the rotation of the earth upon its axis, was forced to write: "I declare that I had no intention to contradict the text of Scripture; that I believe most firmly all therein related about the creation, both as to order of time and matter of fact. I abandon everything in my book respecting the formation of the earth, and generally all which may be contrary to the narrative of Moses."

Such are the more heinous examples of

the persecution of the men who discovered the truths of science. To these should be added the wholesale persecution of witches and magicians, for unusual knowledge of any sort ran the chance of being regarded as contrary to biblical teaching and of being attributed to the machinations of the Prince of Darkness.

Every new step made in the direction of scientific truth has had thus to face the most determined opposition. Persecution by torture and death died out, but up to the nineteenth century, and well on through it, denunciation, excommunication, suppression, the loss of honorable positions have all been used as weapons by church or university in the attempt to stamp out whatever it considered dangerous and subverting doctrines of science.

The decisive battle was not to be inaugurated until the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the advent in the field of such names in science as Spencer, Darwin, Tyndall and Huxley, and such names in biblical criticism as Strauss and Renan.

The outposts, it is true, had been won by advancing scientific thought, for step by step the Church had compromised, and had admitted one scientific doctrine after another as not incompatible with biblical truth. But

now, not only theology, the imperfect armor in which the spirit had been clothed, was attacked, but the very existence of spirit itself was to be questioned. The thinking world was to be divided into materialists and supernaturalists. Now, at last, mind and spirit, who in the ages long gone had been brothers, were to stand face to face as enemies. Was this mortal combat to end in the annihilation of either, or would this, too, end in a compromise leading to harmony?

At the dawn of this century, in 1812, came into the world its master poetic mind. I say this to-day without hesitation, for no other English poet of the century has been so thoroughly aware of the intellectual tendencies of his century, and has so emotionalized them and brought them before us under the humanly real conditions of dramatic utterance.

It is not surprising, considering this fact, that in his second poem, written in 1835, Browning ventures into the arena and at once tackles the supreme problem of the age, what is to be the relation of mind and spirit?

It is characteristic of the poetic methods, which dominated his work, that he should have presented this problem through the personality of a historical figure who played no

inconsiderable part in the intellectual development of his time, though not a man to whom general historians have been in the habit of assigning much space in their pages. Browning, however, as Hall Griffin informs us, had been familiar with the name of Paracelsus from his childhood, of whom he had read anecdotes in a queer book, Wanley's "Wonders of the Little World." Besides, his father's library, wherein as a boy he was wont to browse constantly, contained the *Opera Omnia* of Paracelsus.

With the confidence of youth and of genius the poet attempts in this poem a solution of the problem. To mind he gives the attribute of knowledge, to spirit the attribute of love.

The poem as a whole does not concern us here except as a background for its final thoughts. In order, however, to put the situation clearly before readers not already familiar with it, I venture to transcribe a portion of a former analysis of my own.

Paracelsus aspires to the acquisition of absolute knowledge and feels born within him the capabilities for attaining this end, and, when attained, it is to be devoted to enlarging the possibilities of man's life. The whole race is to be elevated at once. Man

may not be doomed to cope with seraphs, yet by the exercise of human strength alone he hopes man may one day beat God's angels.

He is a revolter, however, against the magical and alchemistic methods of his age, which seek for the welfare of men through the elixir of youth or the philosopher's stone. He especially disclaims such puerile schemes in the passionate moment when he has realized how futile all his lifelong efforts have been. He stands, indeed, at the threshold of a new world. He has a glimmering of the true scientific methods which would discover first the secrets of life's laws, and then use these natural laws to bring about life's betterment, instead of hoping for salvation through the discovery of some magic secret by means of which life's laws might be overcome. Yet he is sufficiently of his own superstitious age to desire and expect fairly magical results from the laws he hopes to discover. The creed which spurs him to his quest is his belief that truth is inborn in the soul, but to set this truth free and make it of use to mankind correspondences in outer nature must be found. An intuitive mind like Paracelsus's will recognize these natural corollaries of the intuition wherever it finds them; and these are what Paracelsus goes forth

over the earth to seek and find, sure he will "arrive." One illustration of the results so obtained is seen in the doctrine of the signatures of plants according to which the flowers, leaves, and fruits of plants indicate by their color or markings, etc., the particular diseases they are intended to cure. The real Paracelsus practised medicine upon this theory.

Though such methods are a long distance from those of the modern scientist, who deduces his laws from careful and patient observation of nature, they go a step toward his in seeking laws in nature to correspond to hypotheses born of intuition.

Browning's presentation of the attitude of mind and the place held by Paracelsus in the development of science is exactly in line with the most recent criticisms of this extraordinary man's life. According to these he fluctuated between the systems of magic then prevalent and scientific observation, but always finally threw in the balance of his opinion on the side of scientific ways of working; and above all made the great step from a belief in the influence of nature upon man to that of the existence of parallelisms between nature processes and human processes.

Though he thus opened up new vistas for

the benefit of man, he must necessarily be a failure, from his own point of view, with his "India" not found, his absolute truth unattained; and it is upon this side that the poet dwells. For a moment he is somewhat reassured by the apparition of Aprile, scarcely a creature of flesh and blood, more the spirit of art who aspires to love infinitely and has found the attainment of such love as impossible as Paracelsus has found the attainment of knowledge. Both have desired to help men, but Paracelsus has desired to help them rather through the perfecting, even immortalizing, of their physical being; Aprile, through giving man, as he is, infinite sympathy and through creating forms of beauty which would show him his own thoughts and hopes glorified by the all-seeing touch of the artist.

Paracelsus recognizes his deficient sympathy for mankind, and tries to make up for it in his own way by giving out of the fulness of his knowledge to men. The scornful and proud reformer has not, however, truly learned the lesson of love, and verily has his reward when he is turned against by those whom he would teach. Then the old ideal seizes upon him again, and still under the influence of Aprile he seeks in human experience the loves and passions of mankind which he

learns through Aprile he had neglected for the ever-illusive secret, but neither does success attend him here, and only on his death-bed does his vision clear up, and he is made to indulge in a prophetic utterance quite beyond the reach of the original Paracelsus.

In this passage is to be found Browning's first contribution to a solution of the great problem. That it is instinct with the idea of evolution has become a commonplace of Browning criticism, a fact which was at least independently or, as far as I know, first pointed out by myself in an early essay upon Browning. At the time, I was reading both Browning and Spencer, and could not but be impressed by the parallelisms in thought between the two, especially those in this seer-like passage and "The Data of Ethics."

Writers whose appreciation of a poet is in direct ratio to the number of exact historical facts to be found in a poem like to emphasize this fact that the doctrine of evolution can be found in the works of Paracelsus. Why not? Since, as we have seen it had been floating about in philosophical thought in one form or another for some thousands of years.

Indeed, it has been stated upon good authority that the idea of a gradual evolution

according to law and of a God from whom all being emanates, from whom all power proceeds, is an inherent necessity of the Aryan mind as opposed to the Semitic idea of an outdwelling God and of supernaturalism. Thus, all down the ages the Aryan mind has revolted from time to time against the religious ideas superimposed upon it by the Semitic mind. This accounts for the numerous heresies within the bosom of the Church as well as for the scientific advance against the superstitions of the Church.

Generalizations of this sweeping order are apt to contain only partial truth. It would probably be nearer the whole truth, as we are enabled to-day to trace historical development, to say that, starting with opposite conceptions, these two orders of mind have worked toward each other and the harmonization of their respective points of view, and, furthermore, that this difference in mind belongs to a period prior even to the emergence of the Aryan or the Semitic. Researches in mythology and folklore seem to indicate that no matter how far back one may go in the records of human thought there will be found these two orders of mind — one which naturally thinks of the universe as the outcome of law, and one which naturally

thinks of it as the outcome of creation. There are primitive myths in which mankind is supposed to be descended from a primitive ancestor, which may range all the way from a serpent to an oak tree, or, as in a certain Zulu myth, a bed of reeds growing on the back of a small animal. And there are equally primitive myths in which mankind is created out of the trees or the earth by an external agent, varying in importance from a grasshopper to a more or less spiritual being.

Browning did not need to depend upon Paracelsus for his knowledge of evolution. He may not have known that the ancient Hindu in the dim mists of the past had an intuition of the cosmic egg from which all life had evolved, and that he did not know of the theory as it is developed in the great German philosophers we are certain, because he, himself, asseverated that he had never read the German philosophers, but it is hardly possible that he did not know something of it as it appears in the writings of the Greek philosophers, for Greek literature was among the earliest of his studies. He might, for instance, have taken a hint from the speculations of that half mythical marvel of a man, Empedocles, with which the Paracelsus theory of the universe, as it appears in the passage

under discussion, has many points of contact.

According to Empedocles, the four primal elements, earth, air, fire and water, are worked upon by the forces of love and discord. By means of these forces, out of the primal elements are evolved various and horrible monstrosities before the final form of perfection is reached. It is true he did not correctly imagine the stages in the processes of evolution, for instead of a gradual development of one form from another, he describes the process as a haphazard and chaotic one. "Many heads sprouted up without necks, and naked arms went wandering forlorn of shoulders, and solitary eyes were straying destitute of foreheads." These detached portions of bodies coming together by haphazard produced the earlier monstrous forms. "Many came forth with double faces and two breasts, some shaped like oxen with a human front, others, again, of human race with a bull's head." However, the latter part of the evolutionary process as described by Empedocles, when Love takes command, seems especially pertinent as a possible source of Browning's thought:

"When strife has reached the very bottom of the seething mass, and love assumes her station in the center of the ball,

then everything begins to come together, and to form one whole — not instantaneously, but different substances come forth, according to a steady process of development. Now, when these elements are mingling, countless kinds of things issue from their union. Much, however, remains unmixed, in opposition to the mingling elements, and these, malignant strife still holds within his grasp. For he has not yet withdrawn himself altogether to the extremities of the globe; but part of his limbs still remain within its bounds, and part have passed beyond. As strife, however, step by step retreats, mild and innocent love pursues him with her force divine; things which had been immortal instantly assume mortality; the simple elements become confused by interchange of influences. When these are mingled, then the countless kinds of mortal beings issue forth, furnished with every sort of form — a sight of wonder."

Though evolution was no new idea, it had been only a hypothesis arrived at intuitionally or suggested by crude observations of nature until by perfected methods of historical study and of scientific experimentation proof was furnished of its truth as a scientific verity.

Let us glance at the situation at the time when Paracelsus was published. In 1835 science had made great strides in the direction of proving the correctness of the hypothesis. Laplace had lived and died and had given to the world in mathematical reasoning of remarkable power proof of the nebular hypothesis, which was later to be verified by Fraunhofer's discoveries in spectrum analysis.

Lamarck had lived and died and had given to the world his theory of animal evolution. Lyall in England had shown that geological formations were evolutionary rather than cataclysmal. In fact, greater and lesser scientific lights in England and on the continent were every day adding fresh facts to the burden of proof in favor of the hypothesis. It was in the air, and denunciations of it were in the air.

Most interesting of all, however, in connection with our present theme is the fact that Herbert Spencer was still a lad of fifteen, who was independently of Darwin to work out a complete philosophy of evolution, which was to be applied in every department of cosmic, geologic, plant, animal and human activity, but (and this is of special interest) he was not to give to the world his plan for a synthetic philosophy until 1860, and not to publish his "First Principles" until 1862, nor the first instalment of the "Data of Ethics," the fruit of his whole system, until 1879.

Besides being familiar with the idea as it crops out in Greek thought, it is impossible that the young Browning was not cognizant of the scientific attitude of the time. In fact, he tells us as much himself, for when

Doctor Wonivall asked him some questions as to his attitude toward Darwin, Browning responded in a letter: "In reality all that seems proved in Darwin's scheme was a conception familiar to me from the beginning."

Entirely familiar with the evolutionary idea, then, however he may have derived it, it is just what might be expected that he should have worked it into Paracelsus's final theory of life. The remarkable thing is that he should have applied its principles in so masterly a fashion — namely, that he should have made a complete philosophical synthesis by bringing the idea of evolution to bear upon all natural, human and spiritual processes of growth twenty-five years before Herbert Spencer, who is regarded on this particular ground as the master mind of the century, gave his synthetic philosophy of evolution to the world.

A momentary glance at the passage in question will make this clear. Paracelsus traces first development as illustrated in geological forms:

> "The center-fire heaves underneath the earth,
> And the earth changes like a human face;
> The molten one bursts up among the rocks,
> Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright
> In hidden mines, spots barren river beds,
> Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask."

Next he touches upon plant life and animal life. The grass grows bright, the boughs are swollen with blooms, ants make their ado, birds fly in merry flocks, the strand is purple with its tribe of nested limpets, savage creatures seek their loves in wood and plain. Then he shows how in all this animal life are scattered attributes foreshadowing a being that will combine them. Then appears primitive man, only half enlightened, who gains knowledge through the slow, uncertain fruit of toil, whose love is not serenely pure, but strong from weakness, a love which endures and doubts and is oppressed. And out of the travail of the human soul as it proceeds from lower to higher forms is finally evolved self-conscious man — man who consciously looks back upon all that has preceded him and interprets nature by means of his own human perceptions. The winds are henceforth voices, wailing or a shout, a querulous mutter or a quick, gay laugh, never a senseless gust, now man is born.

But development does not end with the attainment of this self-consciousness. After this stage has been reached there continues an evolution which is distinctively spiritual, a tendency to God. Browning was not content

with the evolution of man, he was prophetic of the final flowering of man in the superman, although he had never heard of Nietszche.

The corollary to this progressive theory of life, a view held by scientific thinkers, is that sin is not depravity, but is merely a lack of development. Paracelsus is therefore made wise to know even hate is but a mask of love, to see a good in evil, a hope in ill-success, to sympathize, even be proud of man's half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim struggles for truth — all with a touch of nobleness despite their error, upward tending all, though weak.

Though there are points of contact between the thought of the true Paracelsus and of Browning, the points of contact between Spencer and Browning are far more significant, for Browning seems intuitively to have perceived the fundamental truths of social and psychic evolution at the early age of twenty-three — truths which the philosopher worked out only after years of laborious study.

We, who, to-day, are familiar with the application of the theory of evolution to every object from a dustpan to a flying machine, can hardly throw ourselves into the atmosphere of the first half of the last century when this dynamic ideal was flung into a world with static ideals. The Christian world

knew little and cared less about the guesses of Greek philosophers, whom they regarded when they did know about them as unregenerate pagans. German thought was caviare to the general, and what new thought of a historical or scientific nature made its way into the strongholds of conservatism filled people with suspicion and dread. Such a sweeping synthesis, therefore, as Browning gives of dawning scientific theories in Paracelsus was truly phenomenal. That it did not prove a bone of contention and arouse controversies as hot as those which were waged later around such scientific leaders as Spencer, Darwin, Huxley, and Clifford was probably due to the circumstance that the poem was little read and less understood, and also to the fact that it contained other elements which overlaid the bare presentation of the doctrines of evolution.

So far I have spoken only of the form of the Paracelsus theory of life, but a theory of life to be complete must have soul as well as form. Only in adding the soul side to his theory of life does Browning really give his solution of the problem, what is to be the relation of mind and spirit?

One other point of resemblance is to be noted between the thought of Browning's

Paracelsus and Herbert Spencer. They agree that ultimate knowledge is beyond the grasp of the intellect. Neither was this a new idea; but up to the time of Spencer it was taken simply as a negative conclusion. Spencer, however, having found this negation makes it the body of his philosophy — a body so shadowy that many of his critics consider it too ghostly to stand as a substantial basis for philosophical thought. He regards the failure of the intellect to picture the nature of the absolute as the most certain proof that our intuitions of its existence are trustworthy, and upon this he bases all religious aspiration. Like the psalmist, he exclaims, "Who by searching can find out God?"

The attitude of Paracelsus is identical as far as the intellect is concerned. His life, spent in the search for knowledge, had proved it to him. But he does not, like Spencer, make it the body of his philosophy. Through the influence of Aprile he is led to a definite conception of the Infinite as a Being whose especial characteristic is that he feels! — feels unbounded joy in his own creations. This is eminently an artist's or poet's perception of the relation of God to his universe. As Aprile in one place says, "God is the perfect poet, who in his person acts his own creations."

As I have already pointed out, the evil of pain, of decay, of degeneration is taken no account of.

There is the constant passing onward from joy to joy. All the processes of nature from the simplest to the most complex bring, in their turn, a delight to their Creator until man appears, and is not only a joy to his Creator, but is the first in the order of creation to share in the joy of existence, the first to arrive at the full consciousness of beauty. So overwhelming is this consciousness of beauty that man perceives it struggling for expression in the hates and fallacies of undeveloped natures.

All this is characteristic of the artistic way of looking at life. The artist is prone either to ignore the ugly or to transmute it by art into something possessing beauty of power if not of loveliness. What are plays like "Hamlet" and "Macbeth," "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," music like "Tristan and Isolde" or the "Pathetic Symphony," Rodin's statues, but actual, palpable realizations of the fact that hate is but a mask of love, or that human fallacies and human passions have within them the seeds of immense beauty if only there appear the artist who can bring them forth. If this is true of the human artist,

how much more is it true of the divine artist in whose shadow, as Pompilia says, even a Guido may find healing.

The optimism of such a theory of existence is intoxicating. Not only does this artist-man look backward and rejoice in all the beauty of past phases of creation, but he looks forward to endless progression in the enjoyment of fresh phases of beauty — "a flying point of bliss remote." This is a universe in which the Prometheus of the old myths is indeed unbound. Mankind is literally free to progress forever upward. If there are some men in darkness, they are like plants in mines struggling to break out into the sunlight they see beyond.

The interesting question arises here, was Browning, himself, entirely responsible for the soul of his Paracelsus theory of life or was there some source beyond him from which he drew inspiration?

It has frequently been suggested that Aprile in this poem is a sort of symbolic representation of Shelley. Why not rather a composite of both Shelley and Keats, the poet of love and the poet of beauty? An examination of the greatest poems of these two writers, "Prometheus Unbound" and "Hyperion," will bring out the elements in both

which I believe entered into Browning's conception.

In the exalted symbolism of the "Prometheus Unbound" Shelley shows that, in his view, evil and suffering were not inherent in the nature of things, the tyranny of evil having gained its ascendancy through the persistence of out-worn ideals, such as that of Power or Force symbolized in the Greek idea of Jupiter. Prometheus is the revolting mind of mankind, enslaved by the tyranny of Jupiter, hating the tyrant, yet determined to endure all the tyrant can inflict upon him rather than admit his right to rule. The freeing of Prometheus and the dethronement of Jupiter come through the awakening in the heart of Prometheus of pity for the tyrant — that is, Prometheus has learned to love his enemies as he loves his friends. The remainder of the poem is occupied with showing the effects upon humanity of this universal awakening of love.

In the fine passage where the Spirit of the Earth hears the trumpet of the Spirit of the Hour sound in a great city, it beholds all ugly human shapes and visages which had caused it pain pass floating through the air, and fading still

"Into the winds that scattered them, and those
From whom they passed seemed mild and lovely forms
After some foul disguise had fallen, and all
Were somewhat changed, and after brief surprise
And greetings of delighted wonder, all
Went to their sleep again."

And the Spirit of the Hour relates:

"Soon as the sound had ceased whose thunder filled
The abysses of the sky and the wide earth,
There was a change: the impalpable thin air
And the all-circling sunlight were transformed
As if the sense of love dissolved in them
Had folded itself around the sphered world."

In the meantime, the over-souls of humanity — Prometheus, symbolic of thought or knowledge, is reunited to Asia, his spouse, symbolic of Nature or emotion, from whom he has long been separated and together with Asia's sisters, Panthea and Ione — retire to the wonderful cave where they are henceforth to dwell and where their occupations are inspired by the most childlike and exalted moods of the soul.

Before considering the bearing of their life of love and art in the cave upon the character of Aprile let us turn our attention for a moment to a remarkable passage in "Hyperion," which poem was written as far back as 1820. Keats, like Shelley, deals with the

dethronement of gods, but it is the older dynasty of Titans — Saturn and Hyperion usurped by Jupiter and Apollo. Shelley's thought in the "Prometheus" is strongly influenced by Christian ideals, but Keats's is thoroughly Greek.

The passing of one series of gods and the coming into power of another series of gods was a familiar idea in Greek mythology. It reflected at once the literal fact that ever higher and higher forces of nature had been deified by them, beginning with crude Nature gods and ending with symbols of the most ideal human attributes, and at the same time that their thought leaned in the direction of interpreting nature as an evolutionary process. Seizing upon this, Keats has presented in the words of the old Titan Oceanus a theory of the evolution of beauty quite as startling as a prophecy of psychological theories upon this subject as Browning's is of cosmic and social theories. Addressing Saturn, Oceanus says:

> We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
> Of thunder, or of love. . . .
> . . . As thou wast not the first of powers
> So art thou not the last; it cannot be:
> From chaos and parental darkness came
> Light, the first fruits of that intestine broil,

That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came
And with it light, and light, engendering
Upon its own producer, forthwith touched,
The whole enormous matter into life.
Upon that very hour, our parentage
The Heavens and the Earth were manifest;
Then thou first-born, and we the giant-race,
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms

.

As Heaven and Earth are fairer far
Than chaos and blank darkness, though once chiefs,
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful,
In will, in action free, companionship
And thousand other signs of purer life,
So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old darkness: nor are we
Thereby more conquered than by us the rule
Of shapeless chaos. For 'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might.
Yea, by that law, another race may drive
Our conquerors to mourn as we do now."

There is in the attitude of Oceanus a magnificent acceptance of this ruthless course of nature reminding one of that taken by such men as Huxley and Clifford in the face of their own scientific discoveries, but one is

immediately struck by the absence of love in the idea. An Apollo, no matter what new beauty he may have, himself, to offer, who yet disregards the beauty of Hyperion and calmly accepts the throne of the sun in his stead, does not satisfy us. What unreason it is that so splendid a being as Hyperion should be deposed! As a matter of fact, he was not deposed. He is left standing forever in our memories in splendor like the morn, for Keats did not finish the poem and no picture of the enthroned Apollo is given. Perhaps Keats remembered his earlier utterance, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever," and cared for his own Hyperion too much to banish him for the sake of Apollo.

Be that as it may, the points in relation to our subject are that Shelley's emphasis is upon the conservation of beauty, while Keats's emphasis is upon the evolution of new beauty.

In the cave where Prometheus and Asia dwell — the cave of universal spirit — is given forth the inspiration to humanity for painting, poetry and arts, yet to be born, and all these arts return to delight them, fashioned into form by human artists. Love is the ruling principle. Therefore all forms of beautiful

art are immortal. Aprile,* as he first appears, is an elaboration upon this idea. He would love all humanity with such intensity that he would immortalize in all forms of art — painting, poetry, music — every thought and emotion of which the human soul is capable, and this done he would say:

> "His spirits created —
> God grants to each a sphere to be its world,
> Appointed with the various objects needed
> To satisfy its own peculiar want;
> So, I create a world for these my shapes
> Fit to sustain their beauty and their strength."

In short, he would found a universal art museum exactly like the cave in which Prometheus dwelt. The stress is no more than it is in Shelley upon a search for new beauty, and there is not a hint that a coming beauty shall blot out the old until Aprile recognizes Paracelsus as his king. Then he awakes to the fact that his own ideal has been partial,

*The influence of the "Prometheus Unbound" upon the conception of Aprile's character was first brought forward by the writer in a paper read before the Boston Browning Society, March 15, 1910, a typewritten copy of which was placed in the Browning alcove in the Boston Public Library. In the "Life of Browning," published the same year and not read by the writer until recently, Mr. Hall Griffin touches upon the same thought in the following words: "From some elements in the myth of Prometheus Browning unmistakably evolved the conception of his Aprile as not only the lover and the poet but as the potential sculptor, painter, orator, and musician."

because he has not been a seeker after knowledge, or new beauty, and in much the same spirit as Oceanus, he exclaims:

> "Lo, I forget my ruin, and rejoice
> In thy success, as thou! Let our God's praise
> Go bravely through the world at last! What care
> Through me or thee?"

But Paracelsus had learned a lesson through Aprile which the Apollo of Keats had not learned. He does not accept kingship at the expense of Aprile as Apollo would do at the expense of Hyperion. He includes in his final theory of life all that is beautiful in Aprile's or Shelley's ideal and adds to it all that is beautiful of the Keats ideal. The form of his philosophy is evolutionary, and up to the time of his meeting with Aprile had expressed itself as the search for knowledge. Through Aprile his philosophy becomes imbued with soul, the attributes of which are the spirit of love and the spirit of beauty, one of which conserves and immortalizes beauty, the other of which searches out new beauty.

So, working hand in hand, they become one, while the search for knowledge, thus spiritualized, becomes the search for beauty always inspired by love. The aim of the evolutionary process thus becomes the unfolding of ever

new phases of beauty in which God takes endless delight, and to the final enjoyment of which mankind shall attain.

To sum up, Browning's solution of the problem in the Paracelsus theory of life is reached not only through a synthesis of the doctrines of evolution as applied to universal activities, cosmic and human, prophetic, on the one hand, of the most advanced scientific thought of the century, but it is a synthesis of these and of the art-spirit in its twofold aspect of love and beauty as already expressed in the poetry of Shelley and Keats.

It is not in the least probable that Browning set to work consciously to piece together these ideals. That is not the method of the artist! But being familiar to him in the two best beloved poets of his youth, they had sunk into his very being, and welled forth from his own subconsciousness, charged with personal emotion, partly dramatic, partly the expression of his own true feeling at the time, and the result be it said is one of the most inspiring and beautiful passages in English poetry.

At the end of his life and the end of the century Herbert Spencer, who had spent years of labor to prove the fallacies in all religious dogmas, and who had insisted upon



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religion's being entirely relegated to intellectually unknowable regions of thought, spoke in his autobiography of the mysteries inherent in life, in the evolution of human beings, in consciousness, in human destiny — mysteries that the very advance of science makes more and more evident, exhibits as more and more profound and impenetrable, adding:

"Thus religious creeds, which in one way or other occupy the sphere that rational interpretation seeks to occupy and fails, and fails the more, the more it seeks, I have come to regard with a sympathy based on community of need: feeling that dissent from them results from inability to accept the solutions offered, joined with the wish that solutions could be found."

Loyal to the last to his determination to accept as knowledge only what the intellect could prove, he never permitted himself to come under the awakening influence of an Aprile, yet like Browning's ancient Greek, Cleon, he longed for a solution of the mystery.

At the dawn of the century, and in his youth, Browning ventured upon a solution. In the remainder of this and the next chapter I shall attempt to show what elements in this solution the poet retained to the end of his life, how his thought became modified, and what relation his final solution bears to the final thought of the century.

In this first attempt at a synthesis of life in which the attributes peculiar to the mind and to the spirit are brought into harmonious relationship, Browning is more the intuitionalist than the scientist. His convictions well forth with all the force of an inborn revelation, just as kindred though much less rational views of nature's processes sprang up in the mind of the ancient Hindu or the ancient Greek.

The philosophy of life herein flashed out by the poet was later to be elaborated fully on its objective or observational side by Spencer — the philosopher par excellence of evolution — and finally, also, of course, on the objective side, to become an assured fact of science through the publication in 1859 of Darwin's epoch-making book, "The Origin of Species," wherein the laws, so disturbing to many at the time, of natural selection and the survival of the fittest were fully set forth.

While the genetic view of nature, as the phraseology of to-day goes, had been anticipated in writers on cosmology like Leibnitz and Laplace, in geology by such men as Hutton and Lyall, and had entered into the domain of embryology through the researches of Von Baer, and while Spencer had already formulated a philosophy of evolution, Darwin

went out into the open and studied the actual facts in the domain of living beings. His studies made evolution a certainty. They revealed the means by which its processes were accomplished, and in so doing pointed to an origin of man entirely opposed to orthodox views upon this subject. Thus was inaugurated the last great phase in the struggle between mind and spirit.

Henceforth, science stood completely revealed as the unflinching searcher of truth. Intuition was but a handmaid whose duty was to formulate working hypotheses, to become scientific law if provable by investigation or experiment, to be discarded if not.

The aspects which this battle has assumed in the latter half of the century have been many and various. Older sciences with a new lease of life and sciences entirely new have advanced along the path pointed out by the doctrines of evolution. Battalions of determined men have held aloft the banner of uncompromising truth. Each battalion has stormed truth's citadel only to find that about its inmost reality is an impregnable wall. The utmost which has been attained in any case is a working hypothesis, useful in bringing to light many new objective phe-

nomena, it is true, but, in the end, serving only to deepen the mystery inherent in the nature of all things.

Such a working hypothesis was the earlier one of gravitation whose laws of action were elaborated by Sir Isaac Newton, and by the great mind of Laplace were still further developed with marvelous mathematical precision in his "Méchanique Celeste."

Such another hypothesis is that of the atomic theory of the constitution of matter usually associated with the name of Dalton, though it has undergone many modifications from other scientific thinkers. Of this hypothesis Theodore Merz writes in his history of nineteenth-century scientific thought:

> "As to the nature of the differences of the elements, the atomic view gives no information; it simply asserts these differences, assumes them as physical constants, and tries to describe them by number and measurement. The atomic view is therefore at best only a provisional basis, a convenient resting place, similar to that which Newton found in physical astronomy, and on which has been established the astronomical view of nature."

The vibratory theories of the ether, the theories of the conservation of energy, the vitalistic view of life, the theory of parallelism of physical and psychical phenomena are

all such hypotheses. They have been of incalculable value in helping to a larger knowledge of the appearances of things, and in the formation of laws of action and reaction, but in no way have they aided in revealing the inner or transcendent realities of the myriad manifestations of nature and life!

During the last half of the century this truth has forced itself with ever increasing power upon the minds of scientists, and has resulted in many divisions among the ranks. Some rest upon phenomena as the final reality; hence materialistic or mechanical views of life. Some believe that the only genuine reality is the one undiscoverable by science; hence new presentations of metaphysical views of life.

During these decades the solid phalanx of religious believers has continued to watch from its heights with more or less of fear the advance of science. Here, too, there has been division in the ranks. Many denounced the scientists as the destroyers of religion; others like the good Bishop Colenso could write such words as these in 1873: "Bless God devoutly for the gift of modern science"; and who ten years earlier had expressed satisfaction in the fact that superstitious belief in the letter of the Bible was giving way to a

true appreciation of the real value of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures as containing the dawn of religious light.

From another quarter came the critical students of the Bible, who subjected its contents to the keen tests of historical and archæological study. Serene, above all the turmoil, was the small band of genuine philosophers who, like Browning's own musician, Abt Vogler, knew the very truth. No matter what disturbing facts may be brought to light by science, be it man's descent from Anthropoids or a mechanical view of sensation, they continue to dwell unshaken in the light of a transcendent truth which reaches them through some other avenue than that of the mind.

Browning belonged by nature in this last group. Already in "Sordello" his attention is turned to the development of the soul, and from that time on to the end of his career he is the champion of the soul-side of existence with all that it implies of character development — "little else being worth study," as he declared in his introduction to a second edition of the poem written twenty years after its first appearance.

On this rock, the human soul, he takes his stand, and, though all the complex waves

of the tempest of nineteenth-century thought break against his feet, he remains firm.

Beginning with "Sordello," it is no longer evolution as applied to every aspect of the universe but evolution as applied to the human spirit which has his chief interest. Problems growing out of the marvelous developments of such sciences as astronomy, geology, physics, chemistry or biology do not enter into the main body of the poet's thought, though there are allusions many and exact which show his familiarity with the growth of these various objective sciences during his life.

During all the middle years of his poetic career the relations of the mind and the spirit seemed to fascinate Browning, especially upon the side of the problems connected with the supernatural bases of religious experience. These are the problems which grew out of that phase of scholarly advance represented by biblical criticism.

Such a poem as "Saul," for example, though full of a humanity and tenderness, as well as of a sheer poetic beauty, which endear it alike to those who appreciate little more than the content of the poem, and to those whose appreciation is that of the connoisseur in poetic art, is nevertheless an interpretation

of the origin of prophecy, especially of the Messianic idea, which places Browning in the van of the thought of the century on questions connected with biblical criticism.

At the time when "Saul" was written, 1845, modern biblical criticism had certainly gained very little hearing in England, for even as late as 1862 Bishop Colenso's enlightened book on the Pentateuch was received, as one writer expresses it, with "almost unanimous disapprobation and widespread horror."

Critics of the Bible there had been since the seventeenth century, but they had produced a confused mass of stuff in their attacks upon the authenticity of the Bible against which the orthodox apologists had succeeded in holding their own. At the end of the eighteenth and the dawn of the nineteenth century came the more systematic criticism of German scholars, echoes of whose theories found their way into England through the studies of such men as Pusey. But these, though they gave full consideration to the foremost of the German critics of the day, ranged themselves, for the most part, on the side of orthodoxy.

Eichhorn, one of the first of the Germans to be studied in England, had found a point of departure in the celebrated "Wolfenbüttel

Fragments," which had been printed by Lessing from manuscripts by an unknown writer Reimarus discovered in the Wolfenbüttel library. These fragments represent criticism of the sweepingly destructive order, characteristic of what has been called the naturalistic school. Although Eichhorn agreed with the writer of the "Fragments" that the biblical narratives should be divested of all their supernatural aspects, he did not interpret the supernatural elements as simply frauds designed to deceive in order that personal ends might be gained. He restored dignity to the narrative by insisting at once upon its historical verity and upon a natural interpretation of the supernatural — "a spontaneous illumination reflected from antiquity itself," which might result from primitive misunderstanding of natural phenomena, from the poetical embellishment of facts, or the symbolizing of an idea.

Doctor Paulus, in his commentary on the Gospels (1800), carried the idea still farther, and the rationalistic school of Bible criticism became an assured fact, though Kant at this time developed an entirely different theory of Bible interpretation, which in a sense harked back to the older allegorical interpretation of the Bible.

He did not trouble himself at all about the historical accuracy of the narratives. He was concerned only in discovering the idea underlying the stories, the moral gist of them in relation to human development. With the naturalists and the rationalists, he put aside any idea of Divine revelation. It was the moral aspiration of the authors, themselves, which threw a supernatural glamour over their accounts of old traditions and turned them into symbols of life instead of merely records of bona fide facts of history. The weakness of Kant's standpoint was later pointed out by Strauss, whose opinion is well summed up in the following paragraph.

"Whilst Kant sought to educe moral thoughts from the biblical writings, even in their historical part, and was even inclined to consider these thoughts as the fundamental object of the history: on the other hand he derived these thoughts only from himself and the cultivation of his age, and therefore could seldom assume that they had actually been laid down by the authors of these writings; and on the other hand, and for the same reason, he omitted to show what was the relation between these thoughts and those symbolic representations, and how it happened that the one came to be expressed by the other."

The next development of biblical criticism was the mythical mode of interpretation in which are prominent the names of Gabler, Schelling, Bauer, Vater, De Wette, and others. These critics among them set themselves the difficult task of classifying the Bible narratives under the heads of three kinds of myths: historical myths, philosophical myths, and poetical myths. The first were "narratives of real events colored by the light of antiquity, which confounded the divine and the human, the natural and the supernatural"; the second, "such as clothe in the garb of historical narrative a simple thought, a precept, or an idea of the time"; the third, "historical and philosophical myths partly blended together and partly embellished by the creations of the imagination, in which the original fact or idea is almost obscured by the veil which the fancy of the poet has woven around it."

This sort of interpretation, first applied to the Old Testament, was later used in sifting history from myth to the New Testament.

It will be seen that it has something in common with both the previously opposed views. The mythical interpretation agrees with the old allegorical view in so far that they both relinquish historical reality in favor of some inherent truth or religious conception

of which the historical semblance is merely the shell. On the other hand it agrees with the rationalistic view in the fact that it really gives a natural explanation of the process of the growth of myths and legends in human society. Immediate divine agency controls in the allegorical view, the spirit of individuals or of society controls in the mythical view.

Neither the out-and-out rationalists nor the orthodox students of the Bible approved of this new mode of interpretation, which was more or less the outcome of the study of the sacred books of other religions. In 1835, however, appeared an epoch-making book which subjected the New Testament to the most elaborate criticism based upon mythical and legendary interpretation. This was the "Life of Jesus, Critically Examined," by Dr. David Friedrich Strauss. This book caused a great stir in the theological world of Germany. Strauss was dismissed from his professorship in the University of Tübingen in consequence of it. Not only this, but in 1839, when he was appointed professor of Church History and Divinity at the University of Zurich, he was compelled at once to resign, and the administration which appointed him was overthrown. This veritable bomb thrown into the world of theology was translated by

George Eliot, and published in England in 1846.

Through this translation the most advanced German thought must have become familiar to many outside the pale of the professional scholar, and among them was, doubtless, the poet Browning, if indeed he had not already become familiar with it in the original. When the content and the thought of Browning's poems upon religious subjects are examined, it becomes certain that he was familiar with the whole trend of biblical criticism in the first half of the century and of its effect upon certain of the orthodox churchmen, and that with full consciousness he brought forward in his religious poems, not didactically, but often by the subtlest indirections, his own attitude toward the problems raised in this department of scientific historical inquiry.

Some of the problems which occupied his attention, such as that in "The Death in the Desert," are directly traceable to the influence of Strauss's book. Whether he knew of Strauss's argument or not when he wrote "Saul," his treatment of the story of David and Saul is not only entirely in sympathy with the creed of the German school of mythical interpreters, but the poet himself

becomes one of the myth makers in the series of prophets — that is, he takes the idea, the Messianic idea, poetically embellishes an old tradition, making it glow with humanness, throws into that idea not only a content beyond that which David could have dreamed of, but suggests a purely psychical origin of the Messianic idea itself in keeping with his own thought on the subject.

The history of the origin and growth of the Messianic ideal as traced by the most modern Jewish critics claims it to have been a slow evolution in the minds of the prophets. In Genesis it appears as the prophecy of a time to come of universal happiness promised to Abraham, through whose seed all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed, because they had hearkened unto the voice of God. From a family ideal in Abraham it passed on to being a tribal ideal with Jacob, and with the prophets it became a national ideal, an aspiration toward individual happiness and a noble national life. Not until the time of Isaiah is a special agent mentioned who is to be the instrument by means of which the blessing is to be fulfilled, and there we read this prophecy: "There shall sprout forth a shoot from the stem of Jesse, upon whom will rest the spirit of Yahveh, the spirit of wisdom

and understanding, of counsel and strength, of the knowledge and fear of God. He will not judge according to appearance, nor will he according to hearsay. He will govern in righteousness the poor, and judge with equity the humble of the earth. He will smite the mighty with the rod of his mouth, and the wicked with the breath of his lips."

The ideal expressed here of a great and wise national ruler who would bring about the realization of liberty, justice and peace to the Hebrew nation, and not only to them but to all mankind, becomes in the prophetic vision of Daniel a mystic being. "I saw in the visions of night, and behold, with the clouds of heaven came down as a likeness of the son of man. He stepped forward to the ancient of days. To him was given dominion, magnificence and rule. And all the peoples, nations and tongues did homage to him. His empire is an eternal empire and his realm shall never cease."

In "Saul" Browning makes David the type of the prophetic faculty in its complete development. His vision is of an ideal which was not fully unfolded until the advent of Jesus himself — the ideal not merely of the mythical political liberator but of the spiritual saviour, who through infinite love would bring

redemption and immortality to mankind. David in the poem essays to cheer Saul with the thought of the greatness that will live after him in the memory of others, but his own passionate desire to give something better than this to Saul awakens in him the assurance that God must be as full of love and compassion as he is. Thus Browning explains the sudden awakening of David, not as a divine revelation from without, but as a natural growth of the human spirit Godward. This new perception of values produces the ecstasy during which David sees his visions, the "witnesses, cohorts" about him, "angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware."

This whole conception was developed by Browning from the single phrase in I Samuel: "And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly." In thus making David prophesy of an ideal which had not been evolved at his time, Browning indulges in what the biblical critic would call prophecy after the fact, and so throws himself in on the side of the mythical interpreters of the Bible.

He has taken a historical narrative, embellished it poetically as in the imaginary accounts of the songs sung by David to Saul,

and given it a philosophical content belonging on its objective side to the dawn of Christianity in the coming of Jesus himself and on its subjective side to his (the poet's) own time — that is, the idea of internal instead of external revelation — one of the ideas about which has been waged the so-called conflict of Science and Religion as it was understood by some of the most prominent thinkers of the latter half of the century. In this, again, it will be seen that Browning was in the van of the thought of the century, and still more was he in the van in the psychological tinge which he gives to David's experience. Professor William James himself could not better have portrayed a case of religious ecstasy growing out of genuine exaltation of thought than the poet has in David's experience.

This poem undoubtedly sheds many rays of light upon the feelings, at the time, of its writer. While he was a profound believer in the spiritual nature and needs of man, he was evidently not opposed to the contemporary methods of biblical criticism as applied to the prophecies of the Old Testament, for has he not himself worked in accord with the light such criticism had thrown upon the origin of prophecy? Furthermore, the poem is not only an instance of his belief in the supremacy

of the human spirit, but it distinctly repudiates the Comtian ideal of a religion of humanity, and of an immortality existing only in the memory of others. The Comte philosophy growing out of a material conception of the universe and a product of scientific thought has been one of the strong influences through the whole of the nineteenth century in sociology and religion. While it has worked much good in developing a deeper interest in the social life of man, it has proved altogether unsatisfactory and barren as a religious ideal, though there are minds which seem to derive some sort of forlorn comfort from this religion of positivism — from such hopes as may be inspired by the worship of Humanity "as a continuity and solidarity in time" without "any special existence, more largely composed of the dead than of the living," by the thought of an immortality in which we shall be reunited with the remembrance of our "grandsires" like Tyltyl and Mytyl in Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird."

Here, as always, the poet throws in his weight on the side of the paramount worth of the individual, and of a conception of life which demands that the individual shall have a future world in which to overcome the flaws and imperfections incident to earthly life.

Although, as I have tried to show, this poem undoubtedly bears witness to Browning's awareness to the thought currents of the day, it is couched in a form so dramatic, and in a language so poetic, that it seems like a spontaneous outburst of belief in which feeling alone had played a part. Certainly, whatever thoughts upon the subject may have been stowed away in the subconscious regions of the poet's mind, they well up here in a fountain of pure inspiration, carrying the thought forward on the wings of the poet's own spirit.

Poems reflecting several phases of the turmoil of religious opinion rife in mid-century England are "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day." Baffling they are, even misleading to any one who is desirous of finding out the exact attitude of the poet's mind, for example, upon the rival doctrines of a Methodist parson and a German biblical critic.

The Methodist Chapel and the German University might be considered as representative of the extremes of thought in the more or less prescribed realm of theology, which largely through the influence of the filtering in of scientific and philosophic thought had divided itself into many sects.

Within the Church of England itself there

were high church and low church, broad church and Latitudinarian, into whose different shades of opinion it is not needful to enter here. Outside of the Established Church were the numerous dissenters, including Congregationalists, Baptists, Quakers, Methodists, Swedenborgians, Unitarians, and numerous others.

There was one broad line of division between the Established Church and the dissenting bodies. In the first was inherent the ancient principle of authority, while the principle of self-government in matters of faith guided all the dissenters in their search for the light.

It is not surprising that with so many differing shades of opinion within the bosom of the Anglican Church it should, in the earlier half of the century, have lost its grip upon not only the people at large, but upon many of its higher intellects. The principle of authority seemed to be tottering to its fall. In this crisis the Roman Catholic Church exercised a peculiar fascination upon men of intellectual endowment who, fearing the direction in which their intellect might lead them, turned to that church where the principle of authority kept itself firmly rooted by summarily dismissing any one who might question

it. It is of interest to remember that at the date when this poem was written the Tractarian Movement, in which was conspicuous the Oxford group of men, had succeeded in carrying over four hundred clergymen and laity into the Catholic Church.

Those who were unafraid followed the lead of German criticism and French materialism, but the large mass of common people found in Methodism the sort of religious guidance which it craved.

To this sect has been attributed an unparalleled influence in the moral development of England. By rescuing multitudes from ignorance and from almost the degradation of beasts, and by fostering habits of industry and thrift, Methodism became a chief factor in building up a great, intelligent and industrious middle-class. Its influence has been felt even in the Established Church, and as its enthusiastic historians have pointed out, England might have suffered the political and religious convulsions inaugurated by the French Revolution if it had not been for the saving grace of Methodism.

Appealing at first to the poor and lowly, suffering wrong and persecution with its founder, Wesley, it was so flexible in its constitution that after the death of Wesley it

broadened out and differentiated in a way that made it adaptable to very varied human needs. In consequence of this it finally became a genuine power in the Church and State of Great Britain.

The poem "Christmas Eve" becomes much more understandable when these facts about Methodism are borne in mind — facts which were evidently in the poet's mind, although the poem itself has the character of a symbolic rather than a personal utterance. The speaker might be regarded as a type of the religious conscience of England. In spite of whatever direct visions of the divine such a type of conscience may gain through the contemplation of nature and the revelations of the human heart, its relations to the past cause it to feel the need of some sectarian form of religion — a sort of inherited need to be orthodox in one form or another. This religious conscience has its artistic side; it can clothe its inborn religious instincts in exquisite imaginative vision. Also, it has its clear-sighted reasoning side. This is able unerringly to put its finger upon any flaw of doctrine or reasoning in the forms of religion it contemplates. Hence, Catholic doctrine, which was claiming the allegiance of those who were willing to put their troublesome intel-

lects to sleep and accept authority where religion was concerned, does not satisfy this keen analyzer. Nor yet is it able to see any religious reality in such a myth of Christ rehabilitated as an ethical prophet as the Göttingen professor constructs in a manner so reminiscent of a passage in Strauss's "Life of Jesus," where he is describing the opinions of the rationalists' school of criticism, that a comparison with that passage is enlightening.

Having swept away completely the supernatural basis of religion, the rationalist is able still to conceive of Jesus as a divine Messenger, a special favorite and charge of the Deity:

> "He had implanted in him by God the natural conditions only of that which he was ultimately to become, and his realization of this destiny was the result of his own spontaneity. His admirable wisdom he acquired by the judicious application of his intellectual powers and the conscientious use of all the aids within his reach; his moral greatness, by the zealous culture of his moral dispositions, the restraint of his sensual inclinations and passions, and a scrupulous obedience to the voice of his conscience; and on these alone rested all that was exalted in his personality, all that was encouraging in his example."

The difficulty to this order of mind of the direct personal revelation lies in the fact that it is convincing only to those who experience

it, having no basis in authority, and may even for them lose its force.

What then is the conclusion forced upon this English religious conscience? Simply this: that, though failing both from the intellectual and the æsthetic standpoint, the dissenting view was the only religious view of the time possessing any genuine vitality. It represented the progressive, democratic religious force which was then in England bringing religion into the lives of the people with a positiveness long lost to the Anglican Church. The religious conscience of England was growing through this Methodist movement. This is why the speaker of the poem chooses at last that form of worship which he finds in the little chapel.

While no one can doubt that the exalted mysticism based upon feeling, and the large tolerance of the poem, reflect most nearly the poet's personal attitude, on the other hand it is made clear that in his opinion the dissenting bodies possessed the forms of religious orthodoxy most potent at the time for good.

In "Easter Day," the doubts and fears which have racked the hearts and minds of hundreds and thousands of individuals, as the result of the increase of scientific knowledge and biblical criticism are given more

personal expression. The discussion turns principally upon the relation of the finite to the Infinite, a philosophical problem capable of much hair-splitting controversy, solved here in keeping with the prevailing thought of the century — namely, that the finite is relative and that this relativity is the proof of the Infinite.

The boldness of this statement, one such as might be found in the pages of Spencer, is by Browning elaborated with pictorial and emotional power. Only by a marvelous vision is the truth brought home to the speaker that the beauties and joys of earth are not all-sufficient, but that they are in the poet's speech but partial beauty, though through this very limitation they become "a pledge of beauty in its plenitude," gleams "meant to sting with hunger for full light." It is not, however, until this see-er of visions perceives the highest gleam of earth that he is able to realize through the spiritual voice of his vision that the nature of the Infinite is in its essence Love, the supreme manifestation of which was symbolized in the death and resurrection of Christ.

This revelation is nevertheless rendered null by the man's conviction that the vision was merely such "stuff as dreams are made

on." At the end as at the beginning he finds it hard to be a Christian.

His vision, which thus symbolizes his own course of emotionalized reasoning, brings hope but not conviction. Like the type in "Christmas Eve," conviction can come to him only through a belief in supernatural revelation. He is evidently a man of broad intellectual endowment, who cannot, as the Tractarians did, lay his mind asleep, and rest in the authority of a church, nor yet can he be satisfied with the unconscious anthropomorphism of the sectarian. He doubts his own reasoning attempts to formulate religious doctrines, he doubts even the revelations of his own mystic states of consciousness; hence there is nothing for him but to flounder on through life as best he can, hoping, fearing, doubting, as many a serious mind has done owing to the nineteenth-century reaction against the supernatural dogmas of Christianity. Like others of his ilk, he probably stayed in the Anglican Church and weakened it through his latitudinarianisms.

A study in religious consciousness akin to this is that of Bishop Blougram. Here we have not a generalized type as in "Christmas Eve," nor an imaginary individual as in "Easter Day," but an actual study of a real

man, it being no secret that Cardinal Wiseman was the inspiration for the poem.

Wiseman's influence as a Catholic in the Tractarian movement was a powerful one, and in the poet's dissection of his psychology an attempt is made to present the reasoning by means of which he made his appeal to less independent thinkers. With faith as the basis of religion, doubt serves as a moral spur, since the will must exercise itself in keeping doubt underfoot. Browning, himself, might agree that aspiration toward faith was one of the tests of its truth, he might also consider doubt as a spur to greater aspiration, but these ideals would connote something different to him from what he makes them mean to Blougram. The poet's aspiration would be toward a belief in Omniscient Love and Power, his doubts would grow out of his inability to make this ideal tally with the sin and evil he beholds in life. Blougram's consciousness is on a lower plane. His aspiration is to believe in the dogmas of the Church, his doubts arise from an intellectual fear that the dogmas may not be true. Where Browning seems to miss comprehension of such a nature as Blougram's is in failing to recognize that on his own plane of consciousness genuine feeling and the perception of

beauty play at least as large a part in the basis of his faith as utilitarian and instinctive reasoning do. While this poem shows in its references to the scientific theories of the origin of morals and its allusions to Strauss, as well as in the indirect portrayal of Gigadibs, the man emancipated from the Church, how entirely familiar the poet was with the currents of religious and scientific thought, it falls short as a fair analysis of a man who is acknowledged to have wielded a tremendous religious influence upon Englishmen of the caliber of Cardinal Newman, Kingsley, Arnold, and others.

If we leave out of account its connection with a special individual, the poem stands, however, as a delightful study of a type in which is depicted in passingly clever fashion methods of reasoning compounded of tantalizing gleams of truth and darkening sophistication.

The poem which shows most completely the effect of contemporary biblical criticism on the poet is "A Death in the Desert." It has been said to be an attempt to meet the destructive criticism of Strauss. The setting of the poem is wonderfully beautiful, while the portrayal of the mystical quality of John's reasoning is so instinct with religious

feeling that it must be a wary reader indeed who does not come from the reading of this poem with the conviction that here, at least, Browning has declared himself unflinchingly on the side of supernatural Christianity in the face of the battering rams of criticism and the projectiles of science.

But if he be a wary reader, he will discover that the argument for supernaturalism only amounts to this — and it is put in the mouth of John, who had in his youth been contemporary with Christ — namely, that miracles had been performed when only by means of them faith was possible, though miracles were probably not what those who believed in them thought they were. Here is the gist of his defence of the supernatural:

"I say, that as a babe, you feed awhile,
Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,
So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:
When they can eat, babes'-nurture is withdrawn.
I fed the babe whether it would or no:
I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.
I cried once, 'That ye may believe in Christ,
Behold this blind man shall receive his sight!'
I cry now, ' Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*
And smile at stories how John's word could cure —
Repeat that miracle and take my faith?'
I say, that miracle was duly wrought
When save for it no faith was possible.

Whether a change were wrought in the shows o' the world,
Whether the change came from our minds which see
Of shows o' the world so much as and no more
Than God wills for his purpose, — (what do I
See now, suppose you, there where you see rock
Round us?) — I know not; such was the effect,
So faith grew, making void more miracles,
Because too much they would compel, not help.
I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.
Wouldst thou improve this to re-prove the proved?
In life's mere minute, with power to use the proof,
Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?
Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die!"

The important truth as seen by John's dying eyes is that faith in a beautiful ideal has been born in the human soul. Whether the accounts of the exact means by which this faith arose were literally true is of little importance, the faith itself is no less God-given, as another passage will make clear:

"Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
What he considers that he knows to-day,
Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
Because he lives, which is to be a man,
Set to instruct himself by his past self;

First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake
As midway help till he reach fact indeed."

The defence of Christianity in this poem reminds one very strongly of the theology of Schleiermacher, a résumé of which the poet might have found in Strauss's "Life of Jesus." Although Schleiermacher accepted and even went beyond the negative criticism of the rationalists against the doctrines of the Church, he sought to retain the essential aspects of positive Christianity. He starts out from the consciousness of the Christian, "from that internal experience resulting to the individual from his connection with the Christian community, and he thus obtains a material which, as its basis of feeling, is more flexible and to which it is easier to give dialectically a form that satisfies science."

Again, "If we owe to him [Jesus] the continual strengthening of the consciousness of God within us, this consciousness must have existed in him in absolute strength, so that it or God in the form of the consciousness was the only operative force within him." In other words, in Jesus was the supreme

manifestation of God in human consciousness. This truth, first grasped by means which seemed miraculous, is finally recognized in man's developing consciousness as a consummation brought about by natural means. John's reasoning in the poem can lead to no other conclusion than this.

Schleiermacher's theology has, of course, been objected to on the ground that if this incarnation of God was possible in one man, there is no reason why it should not frequently be possible. This is the orthodox objection, and it is voiced in the comment added by "One" at the end of the poem showing the weakness of John's argument from the strictly orthodox point of view.

With regard to the miracles being natural events supernaturally interpreted — that is an explanation familiar to the biblical critic, and one which the psychologist of to-day is ready to support with numberless proofs and analyses. How much this poem owes to hints derived from Strauss's book is further illustrated by the "Glossa of Theotypas," which is borrowed from Origen, whose theory is referred to by Strauss in his Introduction as follows: "Origen attributes a threefold meaning to the Scriptures, corresponding with his distribution of the human being into three

parts, the liberal sense answering to the body, the moral to the soul, and the mystical to the spirit."

On the whole, the poem appears to be influenced more by the actual contents of Strauss's book than to be deliberately directed against his thought, for John's own reasoning when his feelings are in abeyance might be deduced from more than one passage in this work wherein are passed in review the conclusions of divers critics of the naturalist and rationalist schools of thought.

The poem "An Epistle" purports to give a nearly contemporary opinion by an Arab physician upon the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. We have here, on the one hand, the Arab's natural explanation of the miracle as an epileptic trance prolonged some three days, and Lazarus's interpretation of his cure as a supernatural event. Though absolutely skeptical, the Arab cannot but be impressed with the beliefs of Lazarus, because of their revelation of God as a God of Love. Thus Browning brings out the power of the truth in the underlying ideas of Christianity, whatever skepticism may be felt as to the letter of it.

The effect of the trance upon the nature of Lazarus is paralleled to-day by accounts,

given by various persons, of their sensations when they have sunk into unconsciousness nigh unto death. I remember reading of a case in which a man described his feeling of entire indifference as to the relations of life, his joy in a sense of freedom and ineffable beauty toward which he seemed to be flying through space, and his disinclination to be resuscitated, a process which his spirit was watching from its heights with fear lest his friends should bring him back to earth. This higher sort of consciousness seems to have evolved in some people to-day without the intervention of such an experience as that of Lazarus or one such as that of the above subject of the Society for Psychical Research.

In describing Lazarus to have reached such an outlook upon life, Browning again ranges himself with the most advanced psychological thought of the century. Hear William James: "The existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe. As a rule, mystical states merely add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness. They are excitements like the emotions of love or ambition, gifts to our spirit by means

of which facts already objectively before us fall into a new expressiveness and make a new connection with our active life. They do not contradict these facts as such, or deny anything that our senses have immediately seized. It is the rationalistic critic rather who plays the part of denier in the controversy, and his denials have no strength, for there never can be a state of facts to which new meaning may not truthfully be added, provided the mind ascend to a more enveloping point of view. It must always remain an open question whether mystical states may not possibly be such superior points of view, windows through which the mind looks out upon a more extensive and inclusive world. The difference of the views seen from the different mystical windows need not prevent us from entertaining this supposition. The wider world would in that case prove to have a mixed constitution like that of this world, that is all. It would have its celestial and its infernal regions, its tempting and its saving moments, its valid experiences and its counterfeit ones, just as our world has them; but it would be a wider world all the same. We should have to use its experiences by selecting and subordinating and substituting just as is our custom in this ordinary naturalistic

world; we should be liable to error just as we are now; yet the counting in of that wider world of meanings, and the serious dealing with it, might, in spite of all the perplexity, be indispensable stages in our approach to the final fulness of the truth."

The vision of Lazarus belongs to the beatific realm, and the naturalistic Arab has a longing for similar strange vision, though he calls it a madman's, for —

> "So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too —
> So, through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
> Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
> Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou must love me who have died for thee.'"

A survey of Browning's contributions to the theological differences of the mid-century would not be complete without some reference to "Caliban" and "Childe Roland." In the former, the absurdities of anthropomorphism, of the God conceived in the likeness of man, are presented with dramatic and ironical force, but, at the same time, is shown the aspiration to something beyond, which has carried dogma through all the centuries, forward to ever purer and more spiritual conceptions of the absolute. In the second, though it be a

purely romantic ballad, there seems to be symbolized the scientific knight-errant of the century, who, with belief and faith completely annihilated by the science which allows for no realm of knowledge beyond its own experimental reach, yet considers life worth living. Despite the complex interpretations which have issued from the oracular tripods of Browning Societies, one cannot read the last lines of this poem —

> "Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
> And blew, '*Childe Roland to the dark Tower came*'" —

without thinking of the splendid courage in the face of disillusionment of such men of the century as Huxley, Tyndall or Clifford.

When we ask, where is Browning in all this diversity of theological opinion? we can only answer that beyond an ever-present undercurrent of religious aspiration there is no possibility of pinning the poet to any given dogmas. Everywhere we feel the dramatic artist. In "Paracelsus" the philosophy of life was that of the artist whose adoration finds its completion in beauty and joy; now the poet himself is the artist experiencing as Aprile did, this beauty and joy in a boundless sympathy with many forms of mystical religious ecstasy. Every one of these poems pre-

sents a conflict between the doubts born of some phase of theological controversy and the exaltation of moments or periods of ecstatic vision, and though nowhere is dogmatic truth asserted with positiveness, everywhere we feel a mystic sympathy with the moving power of religious aspiration, a sympathy which belongs to a form of consciousness perhaps more inclusive than the religious — namely, a poetic consciousness, able at once to sympathize with the content and to present the forms of mystic vision belonging to various phases of human consciousness.

II

THE CENTURY'S END: PROMISE OF PEACE

PASSING onward from this mid-century phase of Browning's interest in what I have called the battle of the mind and the spirit, we find him in his later poems taking up the subject in its broader aspects, more as he treated it in "Paracelsus," yet with a marked difference in temper. God is no longer conceived of merely as a divine creator, joying in the wonder and beauty of his creations. The ideal of the artist has been modified by the observation of the thinker and the feeling induced by human rather than by artistic emotion. Life's experiences have shown to the more humanly conscious Browning that the problem of evil is not one to be so easily dismissed. The scientist may point out that evil is but lack of development, and the lover and artist may exult when he sees the wonderful processes of nature and mind carrying forward development until he can picture a time when the evil shall become null and void, but the human, feeling being sees the

misery and the unloveliness of evil. It does not satisfy him to know that it is lack of development or the outcome of lack of development, nor yet that it will grow less as time goes on he ponders the problem, "why is evil permitted, how is it to be harmonized with the existence of a universe planned upon a scheme which he believes to be the outcome of a source all-powerful and all-loving!"

About this problem and its corollary, the conception of the infinite, Browning's latter-day thought revolves as it did in his middle years about the basis of religious belief.

It is one of the strange freaks of criticism that many admirers of Browning's earlier work have failed to see the importance of his later poems, especially "Ferishtah's Fancies," and "The Parleyings," not only as expressions of the poet's own spiritual growth, but as showing his mental grasp of the problems which the advance of nineteenth-century scientific thought brought to the fore in the last days of the century.

The date at which various critics have declared that Browning ceased to write poetry might be considered an index of the time when that critic's powers became atrophied. No less a person than Edmund Gosse is of the opinion that since 1868 the poet's books were

chiefly valuable as keeping alive popular interest in him, and as leading fresh generations of readers to what he had already published. Fortunately it has long been admitted that Homer sometimes nods, though not with such awful effect as was said to attend the nods of Jove. Hence, in spite of Mr. Gosse's undoubted eminence as a critic, we may dare to assume that in this particular instance he fell into the ancient and distinguished trick of nodding.

If Mr. Gosse were right, it would practically put on a par with a mere advertising scheme many poems which have now become household favorites. Take, for example, "Hervé Riel." Think of the blue-eyed Breton hero whom all the world has learned to love through Browning, tolerated simply as an index finger to "The Pied Piper of Hamelin." Take, too, such poems, as "Donald." This man's dastardly sportsmanship is so vividly portrayed that it has the power to arouse strong emotion in strong men, who have been known literally to break down in the middle of it through excess of feeling; "Ivan Ivanovitch," in which is embodied such fear and horror that weak hearts cannot stand the strain of hearing it read; the story of the dog Tray, who rescued a drowning doll with

the same promptitude as he did a drowning child — at the relation of whose noble deeds the eyes of little children grow eager with excitement and sympathy. And where is there in any poet's work a more vivid bit of tragedy than "A Forgiveness?"

And would not an unfillable gap be left in the ranks of our friends of the imaginative world if Balaustion were blotted out? — the exquisite lyric girl, brave, tender and with a mind in which wisdom and wit are fair play fellows.

As Carlyle might say, "Verily, verily, Mr. Gosse, thou hast out-Homered Homer, and thy nod hath taken upon itself very much the semblance of a snore."

These and many others which might be mentioned since the date when Mr. Gosse autocratically put up the bars to the poet's genius are now universally accepted. There are others, however, such as "The Red Cotton Night-cap Country," "The Inn Album," "Aristophanes' Apology," "Fifine at the Fair," which are liable at any time to attacks from atrophied critics, and among these are the groups of poems which are to form the center of our present discussion.

Without particularizing either critics or criticism it may be said that criticism of these

poems divides itself into the usual three branches — one which objects to their philosophy, one which objects to their art, one which finds them difficult of comprehension at all. This last criticism may easily be disposed of by admitting it is in part true. The mind whose highest reaches of poetic inspiration are ministered unto by such simple and easily understandable lyrics as "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," might not at once grasp the significance of the Parleying with George Bubb Dodington. Indeed, it may be surmised that some minds might sing upon the starry heights with Hegel and fathom the equivalence of being and non-being, and yet be led into a slough of despond by this same cantankerous George.

But a poetical slough of despond may be transfigured in the twinkling of an eye — after a proper amount of study and hard thinking — into an elevated plateau with prospects upon every side, grand or terrible or smiling.

Are we never to feel spurred to any poetical pleasure more vigorous than dilly-dallying with Keats while we feast our eyes upon the wideness of the seas? or lazily floating in a lotos land with Tennyson, perhaps, among the meadows of the Musketaquid, in canoes

with silken cushions? Beauty and peace are the reward of such poetical pleasures. They fall upon the spirit like the "sweet sound that breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odor," but shall we never return from the land where it is always afternoon? Is it only in such a land as this that we realize the true power of emotion? Rather does it conduce to the slumber of emotion, for progress is the law of feeling as it is the law of life, and many times we feel — yes, feel — with tremendous rushes of enthusiasm like climbing Matterhorns with great iron nails in our shoes, with historical and archæological and philosophical Alpen-stocks in our hands, and when we reach the summit what unsuspected beauties become ours!

Then let us hear no more of the critic who wishes Browning had ceased to write in 1868 or at any other date. It may be said of him, not as of Whitman, "he who reads my book touches a man," but "he who reads my poems from start to finish grasps the life and thought of a century."

There will be no exaggeration in claiming that these two series of poems form the keystone to Browning's whole work. They are like a final synthesis of the problems of existence which he has previously portrayed

and analyzed from myriad points of view in his dramatic presentation of character and his dramatic interpretations of spiritual moods.

In "Pauline," before the poet's personality became more or less merged in that of his characters, we obtain a direct glimpse of the poet's own artistic temperament, and may literally acquaint ourselves with those qualities which were to be a large influence in moulding his work.

As described by himself, the poet of "Pauline" was

> "Made up of an intensest life,
> Of a most clear idea of consciousness
> Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
> From all affections, passions, feelings, powers;
> And thus far it exists, if tracked, in all:
> But linked in me to self-supremacy,
> Existing as a center to all things,
> Most potent to create and rule and call
> Upon all things to minister to it."

This sense of an over-consciousness is the mark of an objective poet — one who sympathizes with all the emotions and aspirations of humanity — interprets their actions through the light of this sympathy, and at the same time keeps his own individuality distinct.

The poet of this poem discovers that he

can no longer lose himself with enthusiasm in any phase of life; but what does that mean to a soul constituted as his? It means that the way has been cleared for the birth of that greater, broader love of the fully developed artist soul which, while entering into sympathy with all phases of life, finds its true complement only in an ideal of absolute Love.

This picture of the artist aspiring toward the absolute by means of his large human sympathy may be supplemented by the theory of man's relation to the universe involved in "Paracelsus" as we have seen.

From this point in his work, Browning, like the Hindu Brahma, becomes manifest not as himself, but in his creations. The poet whose portrait is painted for us in "Pauline" is the same poet who sympathetically presents a whole world of human experiences to us, and the philosopher whose portrait is drawn in "Paracelsus" is the same who interprets these human experiences in the light of the great life theories therein presented.

But as the creations of Brahma return into himself, so the human experiences Browning has entered into artistic sympathy with return to enrich his completed view of the problems of life, when, like his own Rabbi Ben Ezra, he

reaches the last of life for which the first was planned in these "Fancies" and "Parleyings."

Though these two groups of poems undoubtedly express the poet's own mature conclusions, they yet preserve the dramatic form. Several things are gained in this way: First, the poems are saved from didacticism, for the poet expresses his opinions as an individual, and not in his own person as a seer, trying to implant his theories in the minds of disciples. Second, variety is given and the mind stimulated by having opposite points of view presented, while the thought is infused with a certain amount of emotional force through the heat of argument.

It has frequently been objected, not only of these poems, but upon general grounds, that philosophical and ethical problems are not fit subjects for treatment in poetry. There is one point which the critic of æsthetics seems in danger of never realizing—namely, that the law of evolution is differentiation, in art as well as in cosmic, organic, and social life. It is just as prejudiced and unforeseeing in these days to limit poetry to this or that kind of a subject, or to say that nothing is dramatic which does not deal with immediate action, as it would have been for Homer to declare that no poem would ever be worthy

the name that did not contain a catalogue of ships.

These facts exist! We have dramas dealing merely with action, dramas in which character development is of prime importance; dramas wherein action and character are entirely synchronous; and those in which the action means more than appears upon the surface, like Hauptmann's "Sunken Bell," or Ibsen's "Master Builder"; then why not dramas of thought and dramas of mood when the brain and heart become the stage of action instead of an actual stage.

Surely such an extension of the possibilities of dramatic art is a development quite natural to the intellectual ferment of the nineteenth century. As the man in "Half Rome" says, "Facts are facts and lie not, and the question, 'How came that purse the poke o' you?' admits of no reply."

By using the dramatic form, the poet has furthermore been enabled to give one a deep sense of the characteristics peculiar to the century. The latter half of Victorian England in its thought phases lives just as surely in these poems as Renaissance Italy in its art phases in "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Andrea del Sarto," and the rest; and this is true though the first series is cast in the form of Persian

fables and the second in the form of "Parleyings" with worthies of past centuries.

It may be worth while for the benefit of the reader not thoroughly familiar with these later poems to pass quickly in review the problems in them upon which Browning bends his poet's insight.

Nothing bears upon the grounds of moral action more disastrously than blind fatalism, and while there have been many evil forms of this doctrine in the past there has probably been none worse than the modern form, because it seems to have sanction in the scientific doctrines of the conservation of energy, the persistence of heredity, and the survival of the fittest. Even the wise and the thoughtful with wills atrophied by scientific phases of fatalism allow themselves to drift upon what they call the laws of development, possessing evidently no realizing sense that the will of man, whether it be in the last analysis absolutely free or not, is a prime factor in the working of these laws. Such people will hesitate, therefore, to throw in their voices upon either side in the solution of great national problems, because, things being bound to follow the laws of development, what matters a single voice! Such arguments were frequently heard among the wise in our own country during the

Cuban and Philippine campaigns. Upon this attitude of mind the poet gives his opinion in the first of "Ferishtah's Fancies," "The Eagle." It is a strong plea for the exercise of those human impulses that lead to action. The will to serve the world is the true force from God. Every man, though he be the last link in a chain of causes over which he had no control, can, at least, have a determining influence upon the direction in which the next link shall be forged. Ferishtah appears upon the scene, himself, a fatalist, leaving himself wholly in God's hands, until he is taught by the dream God sent him that man's part is to act as he saw the eagle act, succoring the helpless, not to play the part of the helpless birdlings.

Another phase of the same thought is brought out in "A Camel Driver," where the discussion turns upon punishment. The point is, if, as Ferishtah declares, the sinner is not to be punished eternally, then why should man trouble himself to punish him? Universalist doctrines are here put into the mouth of Ferishtah, and not a few modern philanthropists would agree with Ferishtah's questioners that punishment for sins (the manifestations of inherited tendencies for which the sinners are not responsible) is

no longer admissible. Ferishtah's answer amounts to this. That no matter what causes for beneficent ends may be visible to the Divine mind in the allowance of the existence of sin, nor yet the fact that Divine love demands that punishment shall not be eternal; man must regard sin simply from the human point of view as absolute evil, and must will to work for its annihilation. It follows then that the punishing of a sinner is the means by which he may be taught to overcome the sin. There is the added thought, also, that the suffering of the conscience over the subtler sins which go unpunished is all the hell one needs.

Another doctrine upon which the nineteenth-century belief in progress as the law of life has set its seal is that of the pursuit of happiness, or the striving for the greatest good of the whole number in which oneself is not to be excluded. With this doctrine Browning shows himself in full sympathy in "Two Camels," wherein Ferishtah contends that only through the development of individual happiness and the experiencing of many forms of joyousness can one help others to happiness and joyousness, while in "Plot Culture" the enjoyment of human emotion as a means of developing the soul is emphasized.

The relation of good and evil in their broader aspects occupy the poet's attention in others of this group. Nineteenth-century thought brought about a readjustment of these relations. Good and evil as absolutely definable entities gave place to the doctrine that good and evil are relative terms, a phrase which we sometimes forget must be understood in two ways: first, that good and evil are relative to the state of society in which they exist. What may be good according to the ethics of a Fejee Islander would not hold in the civilized society of to-day. This is the evil of lack of development which in the long run becomes less. On the other hand, there is the evil of suffering and pain which it is more difficult to reconcile with the idea of omnipotent power. In "Mihrab Shah," Browning gives a solution of this problem in consonance with the idea that were it not for evil we should not have learned how to appreciate the good, to work for it, and, in doing so, bring about progress.

To his pupil, worried over this problem, Ferishtah points out that evil in the form of bodily suffering has given rise to the beautiful sentiments of pity and sympathy. Having proved in this way that good really grows out of evil, there is still the query, shall evil

be encouraged in order that good may be evolved? "No!" Ferishtah declares, man bound by man's conditions is obliged to estimate as "fair or foul right, wrong, good, evil, what man's faculty adjudges as such," therefore the man will do all he can to relieve the suffering or poor Mihrab Shah with a fig plaster.

The final answers, then, which Browning gives to the ethical problems which grew out of the acceptance of modern scientific doctrines are, in brief, that man shall use that will-power of which he feels himself possessed — the power really distinguishing him from the brute creation — in working against whatever appears to him to be evil; while that good for which he shall work is the greatest happiness of all.

In the remaining poems of the group we have the poet's mature word upon the philosophical doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, a doctrine which received the most elaborate demonstration from Herbert Spencer in many directions. It is insisted upon in "Cherries," "The Sun," in "A Bean Stripe also Apple Eating," and especially in that remarkable poem, "A Pillar at Sebzevar." That knowledge fails is the burden of these poems. Knowledge the golden is but lacquered ignorance, as gain to be mistrusted.

Curiously enough, this contention of Browning's has been the cause of most of the criticisms against him as a thinker, yet the deepest thinkers of to-day as well as many in the past have held the opinio in some form or another that the intellect was unable to solve the mysterious problems of the universe. Even the metaphysicians who build their unstable air castles on *à priori* ideas declare these ideas cannot be matters of mere intellectual perception, but must be intuitions of the higher reason. Browning, however, does not rest in the mere assertion that the intellect fails. From this truth, so disconcerting to many, he draws immense comfort. Though intellectual knowledge be mistrusted as gain, it is not to be mistrusted as means to gain, for through its very failure it becomes a promise of greater things.

"Friend," quoth Ferishtah in "A Pillar of Sebzevar,"

"As gain — mistrust it! Nor as means to gain:
Lacquer we learn by: cast in firing-pot,
We learn — when what seemed ore assayed proves dross
Surelier true gold's worth, guess how purity
I' the lode were precious could one light on ore
Clarified up to test of crucible.
The prize is in the process: knowledge means
Ever-renewed assurance by defeat
That victory is somehow still to reach."

For men with minds of the type of Spencer's this negative assurance of the Infinite is sufficient, but human beings as a rule will not rest satisfied with such cold abstractions. Though Job said thousands of years, ago "Who by searching can find out God," mankind still continues to search. They long to know something of the nature of the divine as well as to be assured of its existence. In this very act of searching Browning declares the divine becomes most directly manifest.

From the earliest times of which we have any record man has been aspiring toward God. Many times has he thought he had found him, but with enlarged perceptions he discovered later that what he had found was only God's image built up out of his own human experiences.

This search of man for the divine is described with great power and originality in the Fancy called "The Sun," under the symbol of the man who seeks the prime Giver that he may give thanks where it is due for a palatable fig. This search for God, Browning calls love, meaning by that the moving, aspiring force of the whole universe in its multifarious manifestations, from the love that goes forth in thanks for benefits received, through the aspiration of the artist toward beauty, of the

lover toward human sympathy, even of the scientist toward knowledge, to the lover of humanity like Ferishtah, who declares, "I know nothing save that love I can, boundlessly, endlessly."

The poet argues from this that if mankind has with ever-increasing fervor aspired toward a God of Love, and has ever developed toward broader conceptions of human love, it is only reasonable to infer that in his nature God has some attribute which corresponds to human love, though it transcend our most exalted imagining of it.

At the end of the century a book was written in America in which an argument similar to this was used to prove the existence of God. This book was "Through Nature to God," by John Fiske, whose earlier work, "Cosmic Philosophy," did much to familiarize the American reading public with the evolutionary philosophy of Spencer.

"Fiske claimed that his theory was entirely original, yet no one familiar with the thought of Browning could fail to see the similarity of their points of view. Fiske based his proof upon analogies drawn from the evolution of organic life in following out the law of the adjustment of inner to outer relations. For example, since the eye has



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through æons of time gradually adjusted itself into harmony with light, why should not man's search for God be the gradual adjustment of the soul into harmony with the infinite spirit? This adjustment, as Browning expresses it, is that of human love to divine love.

Other modern thinkers, notably Schleiermacher in Germany and Shaftsbury in England, have placed the basis of religious truth in feeling. The idea is thus not a new one. Yet in Browning's treatment of it the conception has taken on new life, partly because of the intensity of conviction with which it is expounded in these later poems, and partly because of its having been so closely knit into the scientific thought of the century.

Optimistically the thought is finally rounded out in "A Bean Stripe also Apple Eating," in which Ferishtah argues that life in spite of the evil in it seems to him on the whole good. He cannot believe that evil is not meant to serve a good purpose since he is so sure that God is infinite in love.

From all this it will be seen that Browning accepts with Spencerians the negative proof of God growing out of the failure of intellect to grasp the realities underlying all phenomena, but adds to it the positive proof based

upon emotion. The true basis of belief is the intuition of God that comes from the direct revelation of feeling in the human heart, which has been at once the motive force of the search for God and the basis of a conception of the nature of God.

It was a stroke of genius on the part of the poet to present such problems in Persian guise, for Persia stands in Zoroastrianism for the dualism which Ferishtah with his progressive spirit decries in his recognition of the part evil plays in the development of good, and through Mahometanism for the Fatalism Ferishtah learned to cast from him. The Persian atmosphere is preserved throughout not only by the introduction constantly of Persian allusions traceable to the great Persian epic, "The Shah Nameh," but by the telling of fables in the Persian manner to point the morals intended.

With the exception of the first Fancy, derived from a fable of Bidpai's, we have the poet's own word that all the others are inventions of his own. These clever stories make the poems lively reading in spite of their ethical content. Ferishtah is drawn with strong strokes. Wise and clever he stands before us, reminding us at times of Socrates — never at a loss for an answer no matter what

bothersome questions his pupils may propound.

If we see the thoughtful and brilliant Browning in the "Fancies" proper, we perhaps see even more clearly the emotional and passionate Browning in the lyrics which add variety and an unwonted charm to the whole. This feature is also borrowed from Persian form, an interesting example of which has been given to English readers in Edwin Arnold's "Gulistan" or "Rose Garden" of the poet Sa'di. Indeed Browning evidently derived the hint for his humorous prologue in which he likens the poems to follow to an Italian dish made of ortolans on toast with a bitter sage leaf, symbolizing sense, sight, and song from Sa'di's preface to the "Rose Garden," wherein he says, "Yet will men of light and learning, from whom the true countenance of a discourse is not concealed, be well aware that herein the pearls of good counsel which heal are threaded on strings of right sense; that the bitter physic of admonition is constantly mingled with the honey of good humor, so that the spirits of listeners grow not sad, and that they remain not exempt from blessings of acceptance."

A further interest attaches to these lyrics because they form a series of emotional

phases in the soul-life of two lovers whom we are probably justified in regarding as Mr. and Mrs. Browning. One naturally thinks of them as companion pictures to Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese." In these the sunrise of a great love is portrayed with intense and exalted passion, while the lyrics in "Ferishtah's Fancies" reflect the subsequent development of such a love, through the awakening of whole new realms of feeling, wherein love for humanity is enlarged criticism from the one beloved welcome; all the little trials of life dissolved in the new light; and divine love realized with a force never before possible.

Do we not see a living portrait of the two poets in the lyric "So the head aches and the limbs are faint?" Many a hint may be found in the Browning letters to prove that Mrs. Browning with just such afrail body possessed a fire of spirit that carried her constantly toward attainment, while he, with all the vigor of splendid health, could with truth have frequently said, "In the soul of me sits sluggishness." These exquisite lyrics, which, whether they conform to Elizabethan models or not, are as fine as anything ever done in this form, are crowned by the epilogue in which we hear the stricken husband crying

out to her whom twenty years earlier he had called his "lyric love," in a voice doubting, yet triumphing in the thought that his life-long optimism is the light radiating from the halo which her human love had irised round his head.

No more emphatic way than the interspersion of these emotional lyrics could have been chosen to bring home the poet's conviction of the value of emotion in finding a positive basis for religious belief.

In the "Parleyings" the discussions turn principally upon artistic problems and their relation to modern thought. Four out of the seven were inspired by artist, poet or musician. The forgotten worthies whom Browning rescued from oblivion make their appeal to him upon various grounds that connect them with the present.

Bernard de Mandeville evidently caught Browning's fancy, because in his satirical poem, "The Grumbling Hive," he forestalled, by a defence of the Duke of Marlborough's war policy, the doctrine of the relativity of good and evil. This subject, though so fully treated in the "Fancies," still continued to fascinate Browning, who seemed to feel the need of thinking his way through all its implications. Fresh interest is added in this

case because the objector in the argument was the poet's contemporary Carlyle, whose well-known pessimism in regard to the existence of evil is graphically presented.

Browning clenches his side of the argument with an original and daring variation upon the Prometheus myth led up to by one of the most magnificent passages in the whole range of his poetry, and probably the finest example anywhere in literature of a description of nature as interpreted by the laws of cosmic evolution. A comparison of this passage with the one in "Paracelsus" brings out very clearly the exact measure of the advance in the poet's thought during the fifty years between which they were written — 1835 and 1887. While in the "Paracelsus" passage it is the thought of the joy in the creator's soul for his creations, and the participation of mankind in this joy of progression while pleasure climbs its heights forever and forever, which occupies the poet's mind, in the later passage, there is no attempt at a definite conception of the divine nature. Force represented in the sunlight is described as developing life upon the earth. The thrill of this life-giving power is felt by all things, and is unquestioningly accepted and delighted in.

"Everywhere
Did earth acknowledge Sun's embrace sublime
Thrilling her to the heart of things: since there
No ore ran liquid, no spar branched anew,
No arrowy crystal gleamed, but straightway grew
Glad through the inrush — glad nor more nor less
Than, 'neath his gaze, forest and wilderness,
Hill, dale, land, sea, the whole vast stretch and spread,
The universal world of creatures bred
By Sun's munificence, alike gave praise."

Man alone questions. His mind reaches out for knowledge of the cause; he would know its nature. Man's mind will not give any definite answer to this question. But Prometheus offered an artifice whereby man's mind is satisfied. He drew sun's rays into a focus plain and true. The very sun in little: made fire burn and henceforth do man service. Denuded of its scientific and mystical symbolism, Browning thus makes the Prometheus myth teach his favorite doctrine, namely, that the image of love formed in the human heart by means of the burning glass supplied by sense and feeling is a symbol of infinite love.

Daniel Bartoli, a Jesuit of the seventeenth century who is dyed and doubly dyed in superstition, is set up by Browning in the next poem simply to be knocked down again upon the ground that all the legendary saints

he worshipped could not compare with a real woman the poet knows. The romantic story of the lady is told in Browning's most fascinating narrative style, so rapid and direct that it has all the force of a dramatic sketch. The heroine's claim upon the poet's admiration consists in her recognition of the sacredness of love, which she will not dishonor for worldly considerations, and finding her betrothed incapable of attaining her height of nobleness, she leaves him free.

This story bears upon the poet's philosophy as it reflects his attitude toward human love, which he considers so clearly a revelation that any treatment of it not absolutely noble and true to the highest ideals is a sin against heaven itself.

George Bubb Dodington is the black sheep of these later poems. He gives the poet an opportunity to let loose all his subtlety and sarcasm, while the reader may exercise his wits in discovering that the poet *assumes* to agree with Dodington in his doubtful doctrine of serving the state with an eye always upon his own private welfare, and pretends to criticise him only for his method of attaining his ends. His method is to disclaim that he works for any other good than that of the State — a proposition so preposterous in his case

that nobody would believe it. The poet then presents what purports to be the correct method of successful statesmanship — namely, to pose as a superior being endowed with the divine right to rule, treating everybody as his puppet, and entirely scornful of any criticisms against himself. If he will adopt this attitude he may change his tactics every year and the people, instead of suspecting his sincerity, will think that he has wise reasons beyond their insight for his changes. The poem is a powerful, intensely cynical argument against the imperialistic temper and in favor of liberal government. This means for the individual not only the right but the power to judge for himself, instead of being obliged to depend, because of his own inefficiency, upon the leadership of the over-man, whose intentions are unfortunately too seldom to be trusted.

The poet called from the shades by Browning, Christopher Smart, is celebrated in the world of criticism for having only once in his life written a great poem. The eulogies upon the beauties of "The Song of David" might not be echoed by all lay readers of poetry; nor is it of any moment whether Browning actually agreed with the conclusions of the critics, since the episode is used merely as a

text for discussing the problem of beauty versus truth in art. Should the poet's province be simply to record his vision of the beauty and the strength of nature and the universe — visions which come to him in moments of inspiration such as that which came once to Christopher Smart? Browning answers the question characteristically with his feet upon the earth. The visions of poets should not be considered as ends in themselves, but as material to be used for greater ends.

The poet should find his inspiration in the human heart, and climb to heaven by its means, not investigate the heavens first. Diligently must he study mankind, and teach as man may through his knowledge.

In "Francis Furini" the subject is the nude in art. The keynote is struck by the poet's declaring he will never believe the tale told by Baldinicci that Furini ordered all his pictures in which there were nude figures burned. He expresses his indignation at the tale vigorously at some length, showing plainly his own sympathies.

The passage in the poem bearing more especially upon the present discussion is the lecture by Furini imagined by the poet to have been delivered before a London audience. It is a long and recondite speech in which

the scientific and the intuitional methods of arriving at truth are compared. While the scientific method is acknowledged to be of value, the intuitional method is claimed as by far the more important.

A philippic against Greek art and its imitation is delivered by the poet in the "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse," whom he makes the scapegoat of his strictures, on the score of a book Lairesse wrote in which was described a walk through a Dutch landscape when every feature was transmogrified by classic imaginings.

To this good soul, an old sepulcher struck by lightning became the tomb of Phaeton, and an old cartwheel half buried in the sand near by, the Chariot of the Sun.

In a spirit of bravado Browning proceeds to show what he himself could make of a walk provided he condescended to illuminate it by classic metaphor and symbol, and a remarkable passage is the result. It occupies from the eighth to the twelfth stanza. It is meant to be in derision of a grandiloquent, classically embroidered style but so splendid is the language, so haunting the pictures, the symbolism so profound that it is as if a God were showing some poor weakling mortal how not to do it — and through his omni-

science must perforce create something wondrously beautiful. The double feeling produced in reading this passage only adds to its interest. After thus classicizing in a manner that might make Euripides, himself, turn green with envy, he nonchalantly remarks:

"Enough, stop further fooling," and to show how a modern poet greets a landscape he flings in the perfectly simple and irresistible little lyric:

> "Dance, yellows, and whites and reds."

The poet's strictures upon classicism are entirely consonant with his philosophy, placing as he does the paramount importance on living realities, "Do and nowise dream," he exclaims:

> "Earth's young significance is all to learn;
> The dead Greek love lies buried in its urn
> Where who seeks fire finds ashes."

The "Parleying" with Charles Avison is more a poem of moods than any of the others. The poet's profound appreciation of music is reflected in his claiming it as the highest artistic expression possible to man. Sadness comes to him, however, at the thought of the ephemeralness of its forms, a fact that is borne in on him because of the inadequateness of

Avison's old march styled "grand." He finally emerges triumphantly from this mood of sadness through the realization that music is the most perfect symbol of the evolution of spirit, of which the central truth —

"The inmost care where truth abides in fulness"—

as Paracelsus expresses it, remains always permanent, while the form is ever changing, but though ever changing it is of absolute value to the time when the spirit found expression in it. Furthermore, in any form once possessing beauty, by throwing one's self into its historical atmosphere the beauty may be regained.

The poem has, of course, a still larger significance in relation to all forms of truth and beauty of which every age has had its living, immortal examples, the "broken arcs" which finally will make the perfect round, each arc perfect in itself, and thus the poet's final pæan is joyous, "Never dream that what once lived shall ever die."

The prologue of this series of poems prefigures the thought in a striking dialogue between Apollo and the Fates wherein the Fates symbolize the natural forces of life, behind which is Zeus or divine power; Apollo's light symbolizes the glamour which hope and

aspiration throw over the events of human existence, without actually giving any assurance of its worth, and the wine of Bacchus symbolizes feeling, by means of which a perception of the absolute is gained. Man's reason, guided by the divine, accepts this revelation through feeling not as actual knowledge of the absolute which transcends all intellectual attempts to grasp it, but as a promise sufficiently assuring to take him through the ills and uncertainties of life with faith in the ultimate triumph of beauty and good.

The epilogue, a dialogue between John Fust and his friends, brings home the thought once more in another form, emphasizing the fact that there can be no new realm of actual, palpable knowledge opened up to man beyond that which his intellect is able to perceive. Once having gained this knowledge of the failure of intellectual knowledge to solve what Whitman calls the "strangling problems" of life, man's part is to follow onward through ignorance.

> "Dare and deserve!
> As still to its asymptote speedeth the curve,
> So approximates Man — Thee, who reachable not,
> Hast formed him to yearningly
> Follow thy whole
> Sole and single omniscience!"

It will be seen from this review of the salient points enlarged upon by Browning in these last groups of poems that he has deliberately set himself to harmonize the intellectual and the intuitional aspects of human consciousness. He has sought to join the hands of mind and spirit. The artistic exuberance of Paracelsus is supplemented by spiritual fervor. To the young Browning, the beauty of immortal, joyous life pursuing its heights forever was as a radiant vision, to the Browning who had grappled with the strangling problems of the century this beauty was not so distinctly seen, but its reality was felt with all the depth of an intensely spiritual nature — a nature moreover so absolutely fearless, that it could unflinchingly confront every giant of doubt, or of disillusionment which science in its pristine egotism had conjured up, saying "Keep to thine own province, where thou art indeed powerful; to the threshold of the eternal we may come through thy ministrations, but the consciousness of divine things cometh through the still small voice of the heart."

Thus, while he accepted every law relating to phenomena which science has been able to formulate, he realized the futility of resting in a primal, wholly dehumanized energy, that

is, something not greater but less than its own outcome, humanity. He was incapable of any such absurdity as Clifford's dictum that "Reason, intelligence and volition are properties of a complex which is made up of elements, themselves not rational, not intelligent, not conscious." Since Clifford's time, the marked differences between the processes of a psychic being like man, and the processes of nature have been so fully recognized and so carefully defined by psychologists that Browning's insistence upon making man the center whence truth radiates has had full confirmation.

Theodore Merz has summed up these psychological conclusions in regard to the characteristics peculiar to man as distinguished from all the rest of the universe in the following words:

"There are two properties with which we are familiar through common sense and ordinary reflection as belonging especially to the phenomena of our inner self-conscious life, and these properties seem to lie quite beyond the sphere and the possibilities of the ordinary methods of exact research.

"As we ascend in the scale of human beings we become aware that they exhibit a special kind of unity which cannot be defined, a unity which, even when apparently lost in periods of unconsciousness, is able to reestablish itself by the wonderful and indefinable property called 'memory' — a center which can only be very imperfectly localized — a

together which is more than a mechanical sum; in fact we rise to the conception of individuality, that which cannot be divided and put together again out of its parts.

"The second property is still more remarkable. The world of the inner processes which accompany the higher forms of nervous development in human beings is capable of unlimited growth and it is capable of this by a process of becoming external: it becomes external, and, as it were, perpetuates itself in language, literature, science and art, legislation, society, and the like. We have no analogue of this in physical nature, where matter and energy are constant quantities and where the growth and multiplication of living matter is merely a conversion of existing matter and energy into special altered forms without increase or decrease in quantity. But the quantity of the inner thing is continually on the increase; in fact, this increase is the only thing of interest in the whole world."

Thus the modern psychologist and the poet who in the early days of the century said the soul was the only thing worth study join hands.

The passage already referred to in "Francis Furini" presents most explicitly the objective or intellectual method and the subjective or intuitional method of the search for truth.

Furini is made to question —

"Evolutionists!
At truth I glimpse from depths, you glance from heights,
Our stations for discovery opposites,
How should ensue agreement! I explain."

He describes, then, how the search of the evolutionist for the absolute is outside of man. "'Tis the tip-top of things to which you strain." Arriving at the spasm which sets things going, they are stopped, and since having arrived at unconscious energy, they can go no further, they now drop down to a point where atoms somehow begin to think, feel, and know themselves to be, and the world's begun such as we recognize it. This is a true presentation of the attitude of physicists and chemists to-day, the latter especially holding that experiment proves that in the atoms themselves is an embryonic form of consciousness and will. From these is finally evolved at last self-conscious man. But after all this investigating on the part of the evolutionist what has been gained? Of power — that is, power to create nature or life, or even to understand it — man possesses no particle, and of knowledge, only just so much as to show that it ends in ignorance on every side. This is the result of the objective search for truth. But begin with man himself, and there is a fact upon which he can take a sure stand, his self-consciousness — a "togetherness," as Merz says, which cannot be explained mathematically by the adding up of atoms; and furthermore an inborn



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certainty that whatever is felt to be within had its rise or cause without: "thus blend the conscious I, and all things perceived in one Effect." Through this subjective perception of an all-powerful cause a reflex light is thrown back upon all that the investigations of the intellect have accomplished. The cause is no longer simply blind energy, but must itself be possessed of gifts as great and still greater than those with which the soul of man is endowed. The forces at work in nature thus become instinct with wonder and beauty, the good and evil of life reveal themselves as a means used by absolute Power and Love for the perfecting of the soul which made to know on and ever must know

> "All to be known at any halting stage
> Of [the] soul's progress, such as earth, where wage
> War, just for soul's instruction, pain with joy,
> Folly with wisdom, all that works annoy
> With all that quiets and contents."

To sum up — our investigations into Browning's thought show him to be a type primarily of the mystic. Mysticism in its most pronounced forms regards the emotions of the human mind as supreme. The mystic, instead of allowing the intellectual faculty to lead the way, degrades it to an inferior

position and makes it entirely subservient to the feelings. In some moods Browning seems almost to belong to this pronounced type; for example, when he says in "A Pillar at Sebzevar," "Say not that we know, rather that we love, therefore we know enough."

It must be remembered, however, that he is not in either class of the supernatural mystic, one of which supposes truth to be gained by a fixed supernatural channel, the other that it is gained by extraordinary supernatural means. On the contrary, truth comes to Browning in pursuance of a regular law or fact of the inward sensibility, which may be defined in his case as a mode of intuition. His intuition of God, as we have seen, is based upon the feeling of love both in its human and its abstract aspects.

But this is not all. Upon the intellectual side Browning accepted the conclusions of scientific investigation as far as phenomena were concerned, and while he denied its worth in giving direct knowledge of the Absolute, he recognized it as useful because of its very failure in strengthening the sense of the existence of a power transcending human conception. "What is our failure here but a triumph's evidence of the fulness of the days?" And, furthermore, with mystic love

already in our hearts, all knowledge that the scientist may bring us of the phenomena of nature and life only adds immeasurably to our wonder and awe of the power which has brought these things to pass, thus "with much more knowledge" comes "always much more love."

Once more, the poet's mysticism is tempered by a tinge of idealism. There are several passages in his poems, notably one already quoted from Furini, which show him to have had a perception of God directly through his own consciousness by means of what the idealist calls the higher reason. His perception, for instance, that whatever takes place within the consciousness had its rise without and that this external origin emanates from God is the idealist's way of arriving at the absolute.

Thus we see that into Browning's religious conceptions enter the intuitions of the artistic consciousness as illustrated in Paracelsus where God is the divine artist joying in his creations, the intuitions of the intellect which finds in the failure of knowledge to probe the secrets of the universe the assurance of a transcendent power beyond human ken, the intuition of the higher reason which affirms God is, and the intuitions of the heart which

promise that God is love, through whom is to come fulfilment of all human aspirations toward Beauty, Truth, and Love in immortality.

If these are all points which have been emphasized, now by one, now by another, of the vast array of thinkers who have crowded the past century, there is no one who to my knowledge has so completely harmonized the various thought tendencies of the age, and certainly none who has clothed them in such a wealth of imaginative and emotional illustration.

In these last poems Browning appears to borrow an apt term from Whitman, as the "Answerer" of his age. In them he has unquestioningly accepted the knowledge which science has brought, and, recognizing its relative character, has yet interpreted it in such a way as to make it subserve the highest ideals in ethics, religion, and art. Far from reflecting any degeneration in Browning's philosophy of life, these poems place on a firmer basis than ever thoughts prominent in his poetry from the first, while adding to these the profounder insight into life which life's experiences had brought him.

The subject matter and form are no less remarkable than their thought. The variety

in both is almost bewildering. Religion and fable, romance and philosophy, art and science all commingled in rich profusion; everything in language — talk almost colloquial, dainty lyrics full of exquisite emotion, and grand passages which present in sweeping images now the processes of cosmic evolution, now those of spiritual evolution, until it seems as if we had indeed been conducted to some vast mountain height, whence we can look forth upon the century's turbulent seas of thought, into which flows many a current from the past, while suspended above between the sea and sky, like the crucifix in Simons's wonderful symbolic picture of the Middle Ages, is the mystical form of divine love and joy which Browning has made symbolic of the nineteenth century.

III

POLITICAL TENDENCIES

IN THE political affairs of his own age and country Browning as a poet shows little interest. This may at first seem strange, for that he was deeply sympathetic with past historical movements indicating a growth toward democratic ideals in government is abundantly proved by his choice and treatment of historical epochs in which the democratic tendencies were peculiarly evident. Why then did he not give us dramatic pictures of the Victorian era, in which as perhaps in no other era of English history the yeast of political freedom has been steadily and quietly working?

There were probably several reasons for his failure to make himself felt as an influence in the political world of his time. In the first place, he was preëminently a dramatic poet, and as such his interest was in the presentation and analysis of individual character as it might work itself out in a given historical environment. To deal with con-

temporaries in this analytic manner would be a difficult and delicate matter, and, as we see, in those instances where he did venture upon an analysis of English contemporaries, as in the case of Wiseman (Bishop Blougram), Carlyle in Bernard de Mandeville and in "George Bubb Dodington," the sketch of Lord Beaconsfield, he takes care to suppress every external circumstance which would lead to their identification, and to dwell only upon their intellectual or psychic aspects.

A second reason is that the present is usually too near at hand to be used altogether effectively as dramatic material. Contemporary conditions of history seem to have an air of stateliness owing to the fact that every one is familiar with them, not only through talk and experience but through newspapers and magazines, while their larger, universal meanings cannot be seen at too close a range. If, however, past historical episodes and their tendencies can be so presented as to illustrate the tendencies of the present, then the needful artistic perspective is gained. In this manner, with a few minor exceptions, Browning has revealed the direction in which his political sympathies lay.

When Browning was born, the first Napoleonic episode was nearing its close. Abso-

lutism and militarism had in its lust for power and bloodshed slaughtered itself for the time being, and once more there was opportunity for the people of England to strive for their own enfranchisement.

As a progressive ministry in England did not come into power until 1830, the struggles of the people were rewarded with little success during many years after the Battle of Waterloo. During the childhood and boyhood of Browning the events which from time to time marked the determination of the downtrodden Englishman to secure a larger measure of justice for himself were exciting enough to have made a strong impression upon the precocious mind of the incipient poet even in the seclusion of his father's library at Camberwell.

The artificial prosperity which had buoyed up the workman during the war with France suddenly collapsed with the advent of peace after the Battle of Waterloo. Everything seemed to combine to make the affairs of the workingman desperate. Public business had been blunderingly administered, and while a fatuous Cabinet was congratulating the nation upon the flourishing state of the country, trade was actually almost at a standstill, and failures in business were the order of the



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day. To make matters worse, a wet summer and early frosts interfered with farming, and the result was that laborers and workmen could not find employment. A not unusual percentage of paupers in any given district was four fifths of the whole population. Thinking the farmers were to blame for the high price of bread, these starving people wreaked their vengeance on them by burning farm buildings, and machinery, and even stacks of corn and hay.

Instead of giving sympathy to these men in their desperate condition, a conservative government saw in them only rioters, and took the most stringent measures against them. They were tried by a special commission, and thirty-four of them were condemned to death, though it is recorded that only five of them were executed. The miners of Cornwall and Wales, the lace makers of Nottingham, and the iron workers of the Black Country, next broke out and the smashing of machinery continued. Finally there was a meeting of the artisans of London, Westminster, and Southwick in Spa Fields, Clerkenwall, which had been called by Harry Hunt, a man of property and education, who was known as a supporter of extreme measures, and the leader of the Radicals of that day. They met for the legitimate purpose,

one would think, of considering the propriety of petitioning the Prince Regent and Parliament to adopt means of relieving the existing distress. One of the speakers, however, a poor doctor by the name of Watson, was of a more belligerent disposition. He made an inflammatory speech which ended by his seizing a tri-colored flag and marching toward the city followed by the turbulent rabble. On their way they seized the contents of a gunsmith's shop on Snow Hill, murdered a man, and finally were met opposite the Mansion House by the Lord Mayor, who, assisted by a strong body of police, arrested some of the leaders and dispersed the rest. The arrested persons were brought to trial and indicted for high treason by the Attorney General, but the jury, evidently thinking the indictment had taken too exaggerated a form, acquitted Watson, and the others were dismissed.

The conservative Parliament was, however, so alarmed by these proceedings that, instead of seeking some way of removing the cause of the difficulties, it thought only of making restrictions for the protection of the person of the Regent, of the more effective prevention of seditious meetings and of surer punishment. And what were some of these measures? Debating societies, lecture halls and

reading rooms were shut up. Even lectures on medicine, surgery and chemistry were prohibited. Though there was a possibility of getting a license to lecture from the magistrate, the law was interpreted in the narrowest spirit.

Parliamentary reform began to be spoken of in 1819, when a resolution pledging the House of Commons to the consideration of the state of representation was rejected by a vote of one hundred and fifty-three to fifty-eight. This decision stirred up the reform spirit, and large meetings in favor of it were held. The people attending these meetings received military drilling and marched to their meetings in orderly processions, a fact naturally very disturbing to the government. When a great meeting was arranged at Manchester on the 16th of August, troops were accordingly sent to Manchester. The cavalry was ordered to charge the crowd, and although they used the flat side of their swords, the charge resulted in the killing of six persons and the wounding of some hundreds. The clash did not end here, for to offset the ministerial approval of the action of the magistrates and their decision that the meeting was illegal, the Common Council of London passed a resolution by a large major-

ity declaring that the meeting was legal. A number of Whig noblemen also were on the side of the London Council and made similar motions. But the ministers, unmoved by these signs of the times, introduced bills in Parliament for the repression of disorder and the further restraining of public liberty. The bills, it is true, were strenuously opposed in both houses, but the eloquence expended against them was all to no purpose, the bills were passed, and reform for the time being was nipped in the bud.

Although after this laws were gradually introduced by the ministers which tended very much to the betterment of conditions, the fire of reform did not burst out again with full fury until the time of the Revolution of July, in France, which it will be remembered was directed against the despotic King Charles X, and ended in his being deposed, when his crown was given to his distant cousin Louis Philippe. The success of the French in their stand against despotism caused a general revolutionary stir in several European countries, while in England the spirit of revolution showed itself in incendiary fires from one end of the country to the other.

With Parliament itself full of believers in reform, the chief of the Cabinet, the Duke of

Wellington, announced that the House of Commons did not need reform and that he would resist all proposals for a change. So great was the popular excitement at this announcement that the Duke could not venture to go forth to dine at the Guildhall for fear that he might be attacked.

Such were the chief episodes in the forward advance of the people up to the time of the presentation of the Reform Bill in Parliament. This important measure has been described as the greatest organic change in the British Constitution that had taken place since the revolution of 1688. When this bill was finally passed it meant a transference of governmental control from the upper classes to the middle classes, and was the inauguration of a policy which has constantly added to the prosperity and well-being of the English people. The agitation upon this bill, introduced in the House by Lord John Russell, under the Premiership of Earl Grey, and a ministry favorable to reform, was filling the attention of all Englishmen to the exclusion of every other subject just at the time when Browning was emerging into manhood, 1831 and 1832, and though he has not commemorated in his poetry this great step in the political progress of his own century, his first

play, written in 1837, takes up a period of English history in which a momentous struggle for liberty on the part of the people was in progress.

Important as the Reform Bill was, it furnished no such picturesque episodes for a dramatist as did the struggle of Pym and Strafford under the despotic rule of King Charles I.

In choosing this period for his play the poet found not only material which furnished to his hand a series of wonderfully dramatic situations, but in the three men about whom the action moves is presented an individuality and a contrast in character full of those possibilities for analysis so attractive to Browning's mind.

Another point to be gained by taking this remote period of history was that his attitude could be supremely that of the philosopher of history. He could portray with fairness whatever worth of character he found to admire in the leaders upon either side, at the same time that he could show which possessed the winning principle — the principle of progress. In dealing with contemporary events a strong personal feeling is sure to gain the upper hand, and to be non-partisan and therefore truly dramatic is a difficult, if not an

impossible, task. When we come to examine this play, we find that the character which unquestionably interested the poet most was Strafford's; not because of his political principles but because of his devotion to his King. Human love and loyalty in whomever manifested was always of the supremest interest to Browning, and, working upon any hints furnished by history, the poet has developed the character of Strafford in the light of his personal friendship for the King — a feeling so powerful that no fickle change of mood on the part of the King could alter it. Upon this fact of his personal relations to the King Strafford's actions in this great crisis have been interpreted and explained, though not defended, from the political point of view.

Some wavering on the part of Pym is also explained upon the ground of his friendship for and his belief in Strafford, but mark the difference between the two men. Pym, once sure that Strafford is not on the side of progress, crushes out all personal feeling. He allows nothing to stand in the way of his political policy. With unflinching purpose he proceeds against his former friend, straight on to the impeachment for treason, straight on, like an inexorable fate, to the prevention of his rescue from execution. Browning's

dramatic imagination is responsible for this last climax in which he brings the two men face to face. Here, in Pym's strength of will to serve England at any cost, mingled with the hope of meeting Strafford purged of all his errors in a future life, and in Strafford's response, "When we meet, Pym, I'd be set right — not now! Best die," is foreshadowed the ultimate triumph of the parliamentary over the monarchical principles of government, and the poet's own sympathy with the party of progress is made plain.

It is interesting in the present connection to inquire whether there are any parallels between the agitation connected with the reform legislation of 1832 and the revolution at the time of Charles I which might send Browning's mind back to that period. The special point about which the battle raged in 1832 was the representation in Parliament. This was so irregular that it was absolutely unfair. In many instances large districts or towns would have fewer representatives than smaller ones, or perhaps none at all. Representation was more a matter of favoritism than of justice. The votes in Parliament were, therefore, not at all a true measure of the attitude of the country. It seems strange that so eminently sensible a reform should

meet with such determined opposition. As usual, those in power feared loss of privilege. The House of Lords was the obstruction. The bill was in fact a step logically following upon the determination of the people of the time of Charles I that they would not submit to be levied upon for ship-money upon the sole authority of the King. They demanded that Parliament, which had not been assembled for ten years, should meet and decide the question. This question was not merely one of the war-tax or ship-money, but of whether the King should have the power to levy taxes upon the people without consent of Parliament.

As every one knows, when the King finally consented to the assembling of Parliament, in April, 1840, he informed it that there would be no discussion of its demands until it had granted the war subsidies for which it had been asked. The older Vane added to the consternation of the assembly by announcing that the King would accept nothing less than the twelve subsidies which he had demanded in his message. In the face of this ultimatum the committee broke up without coming to a conclusion, postponing further consideration until the next day, but before they had had time to consider the matter the next day

the King had decided to dissolve the Parliament.

The King was forced, however, to reassemble Parliament again in the autumn. In this Parliament the people's party gained control, and many reforms were instituted. Led by such daring men as Pym, Hampden, Cromwell, and the younger Vane, resolutions were passed censuring the levying of ship-money, tonnage and poundage, monopolies, innovations in religion — in fact, all the grievances of the oppressed which had been ignored for a decade were brought to light and redressed by the House, quite regardless of the King's attitude.

The chief of the abuses which it was bent upon remedying was the imposing of taxes upon the authority of the King and the persecution of the Puritans. But there was another grievance which received the attention of the Long Parliament, and which forms a close link with the reforms of 1832 — namely, the attempt to improve the system of representation in Parliament, an attempt which was partially carried into effect by Cromwell later. Under Charles II, however, things fell back into their old way and gradually went on from bad to worse until the tide changed, and the people became finally

aroused after two hundred years to the need of a radical change. The blindness of the Duke of Wellington, declaring no reform was needed, is hardly less to be marveled at than that of King Charles declaring he would rule without Parliament. The King took the ground that the people had no right to representation in the government; the Minister, that only some of the people had a right.

The horrors of revolution followed upon the blindness of the one, with its reactionary aftermath, while upon the other there was violence, it is true, and a revolution was feared, but through the wise measures of the liberal ministers no subversion of the government occurred. Violence reached such a pitch, however, that the castle of Nottingham in Derby was burned, the King's brother was dragged from his horse, and Lord Londonderry roughly treated. The mob at Bristol was so infuriated that Sir C. Wetherell, the Recorder of the city, who had voted against the bill, had to be escorted to the Guildhall by a hundred mounted gentlemen. Two men having been arrested, the mob attacked and destroyed the interior of the Mansion House, set fire to the Bishop's palace and to many other buildings. There was not only an enormous loss of property, but loss of life.

A quieter demonstration at Birmingham carries us back, as it might have carried Browning, to the "great-hearted men" of the Long Parliament. A meeting was called which was attended by one hundred and fifty thousand persons, and resolutions were passed to the effect that if the Reform Bill were not passed they would refuse to pay taxes, as Hampden had refused to pay ship-money.

The final act in this momentous drama was initiated with the introduction by Lord John Russell of the third Reform Bill in December, 1831. Again it was defeated in the House of Lords, whereupon some of the Cabinet wished to ask the King to create a sufficient number of new peers to force the bill through the House. Earl Grey was not at all in favor of this, but at last consented. This course was not welcome to the House of Lords, and the doubtful members in the House promised that if this suggestion were not carried into effect they would insure a sufficient majority in the House of Lords to carry the bill. This was done, but before the Lords went into committee a hostile motion postponing the disfranchisement clauses was carried. Then Earl Grey asked for the creation of new peers. As it would require the creating of about

fifty new peers, the King refused, the ministry resigned and the Duke of Wellington came into power again. But his power, like that of Strafford, was broken. He had reached the point of recognizing that some reform was needed, but he could not persuade his colleagues of this. In the meantime the House of Commons passed a resolution of confidence in the Grey administration. Such determined opposition being shown not only in Parliament but by the people in various ways, Wellington felt his only course was resignation. William IV had, much to his chagrin, to recall Grey, but he escaped the necessity of creating a large number of peers, by asking the opposition in the House of Lords to withdraw their resistance to the bill. The Duke of Wellington and others thereupon absented themselves, and finding further obstruction was useless, the Lords at last passed the bill and it became law in June, 1832.

This national crisis through which Browning had lived could not fail to have made its impression on him. It is certainly an indication of the depth of his interest in the growth of liberalism that his first English subject, written only a few years subsequent to this momentous change in governmental methods, should have dealt with a period whose analy-

sis and interpretation in dramatic form gave him every opportunity for the expression of his sympathy with liberal ideals. Broad-minded in his interpretation of Strafford's career, in love with his qualities of loyalty, and his capabilities of genuine affection for the vacillating Charles, he made Strafford the hero of his play, but it is Pym whom, in his play, he has exalted as the nation's hero, and into whose mouth he has put one of the greatest and most intensely pathetic speeches ever uttered by an Englishman. It is when he confronts Strafford at the last:

> "Have I done well? Speak, England! Whose sole sake
> I still have labored for, with disregard
> To my own heart, — for whom my youth was made
> Barren, my manhood waste, to offer up
> Her sacrifice — this friend — this Wentworth here —
> Who walked in youth with me, loved me, it may be,
> And whom, for his forsaking England's cause,
> I hunted by all means (trusting that she
> Would sanctify all means) even to the block
> Which waits for him. And saying this, I feel
> No bitterer pang than first I felt, the hour
> I swore that Wentworth might leave us, but I
> Would never leave him: I do leave him now.
> I render up my charge (be witness, God!)
> To England who imposed it. I have done
> Her bidding — poorly, wrongly, — it may be,
> With ill effects — for I am weak, a man:

Still, I have done my best, my human best,
Not faltering for a moment. It is done.
And this said, if I say . . . yes, I will say
I never loved but one man — David not
More Jonathan! Even thus I love him now:
And look for that chief portion in that world
Where great hearts led astray are turned again,
(Soon it may be, and, certes, will be soon:
My mission over, I shall not live long) —
Ay, here I know and talk — I dare and must,
Of England, and her great reward, as all
I look for there; but in my inmost heart,
Believe, I think of stealing quite away
To walk once more with Wentworth — my youth's friend
Purged from all error, gloriously renewed,
And Eliot shall not blame us. Then indeed . . .
This is no meeting, Wentworth! Tears increase
Too hot. A thin mist — is it blood? — enwraps
The face I loved once. Then, the meeting be."

At the same time that Browning was writing "Strafford," he was also engaged upon "Sordello." In that he has given expression to his democratic philosophy through his construction and interpretation of Sordello's character as a champion of the people as well as a poet who ushered in the dawn of the Italian literary Renaissance. As he made Paracelsus develop from a dependence upon knowledge as his sole guide in his philosophy of life into a perception of the place emotion must hold in any satisfactory theory of life,

and put into his mouth a modern conception of evolution illuminated by his own artistic emotion, so he makes Sordello develop from the individualistic type to the socialist type of man, who is bent upon raising the masses of the people to higher conditions. The ideal of liberal forms of government was even in Sordello's time a growing one, sifting into Italy from Greek precedents, but Browning's Sordello sees something beyond either political or ecclesiastical espousal of the people's cause — namely, the espousal of the people's cause by the people themselves, the arrival of the self-governing democracy, an ideal much nearer attainment now than when Browning was writing:

"Two parties take the world up, and allow
No third, yet have one principle, subsist
By the same injustice; whoso shall enlist
With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
So there is one less quarrel to compose
The Guelf, the Ghibelline may be to curse —
I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
Than nothing. Nay, to me, forgotten, reft
Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
The notion of a service — ha? What lured
Me here, what mighty aim was I assured
Must move Taurello? What if there remained
A cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained
For me its true discoverer?"

The mood here portrayed was one which might have been fostered in Browning in relation to his own time. He doubtless felt that neither the progressive movements in the state nor those in religion really touched upon the true principles of freedom for the individual. He might not have defined these principles to himself any more definitely than as a desire for the greatest happiness of the whole number. And even of such an ideal as that he had his doubts because of the necessity of his mind to find a logical use for evil in the world. This he could only do by supposing it a divine means for the development of the human soul in its sojourn in this life. Speaking in his own person in "Sordello," he gives expression to this doubt in the following passage in the third book:

> "I ask youth and strength
> And health for each of you, not more — at length
> Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race
> Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,
> And all be dizened out as chiefs and bards.
>
>
>
> " ——As good you sought
> To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone
> Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,
> As hinder Life the evil with the good
> Which make up Living rightly understood."

Still, though vague as to what the good for the whole people might be, there was no vagueness in his mind as to the people's right to possess the power to bring about their own happiness. Yet given the right principles, he would not have the attempt made to put them into practice all at once.

His final attitude toward the problem of the best methods for bettering human conditions in the poem is, strictly speaking, that of the opportunist working a step toward his ideal rather than that of the revolutionist who would gain it by one leap. Sordello should realize that

> God has conceded two lights to a man —
> One, of men's whole work, man's first
> Step to the plan's completeness."

Man's part is to take this first step, leaving the ultimate ideal to be worked out, as time goes, on by successive men. To reach at one bound the ideal would be to regard one's self as a god. Some such theory of action as this is the one which guides the Fabian socialist working in England to-day. Nothing is to be done to subvert the present order of society, but every opportunity is to be made the most of which will tend to the betterment of the conditions of the masses, until by

degrees the socialist régime will become possible. Sordello was too much of the idealist to seize the opportunity when it came to him of helping the people by means of the Ghibelline power suddenly conferred upon him, and so he failed.

This opportunist doctrine is one especially congenial to the English temperament and certainly has its practical advantages, if it is not so inspiring as the headlong idealism of a Pym, which just as surely has its disadvantages in the danger that the ideal will be ahead of humanity's power of seizing it and living it, and will therefore run the risk of being overturned by a reaction to the low plane of the past; especially does this danger become apparent when the way to the attainment of the ideal is paved with violence.

While Browning was writing "Sordello," the preparation of which included a short trip to Italy, the Chartist agitation was going on in England. It may well, at that time, have been considered to demand an ideal beyond possibility of attainment, which was proved by its final utter annihilation. The workingmen's association led by Mr. Duncombe was responsible for a program in the form of a parliamentary petition which asked for six things. These were: universal suffrage,

or the right of voting by every male of twenty-one years of age; vote by ballot; annual Parliaments; abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament; members of Parliament to be paid for their services; equal electoral districts.

There were two sorts of Chartists, moral-force Chartists and physical-force Chartists, the latter of whom did as much damage as possible in the agitation.

The combined forces were led by Feargus O'Connor, an Irish barrister, who madly spent his force and energy for ten years in carrying forward the movement, and, at last, confronted by disagreement in the ranks of the Chartists and the Duke of Wellington and his troops, gave it up in despair. He was a martyr to the cause, for he took its failure so much to heart that he ended his days in a lunatic asylum.

This final failure came many years after "Sordello" was finished, but the poet's conclusions in "Sordello" seem almost prophetic in the light of the passage in the poem already quoted, in which the poet declares himself grown wiser than he was at home, where he had asked the utmost for all men, and now realized that this cannot be attained in one leap.

Agitation about the relations between England and Ireland were also filling public attention at this time, but most important of all the contemporary movements was the League for the Repeal of the Corn Laws. The story of the growth and the peaceful methods by which it attained its growth is one of the most interesting in the annals of England's political development. It meant the adoption of the great principle of free trade, to which England has since adhered. For eight years the agitation in regard to it was continued, during which great meetings were held, thousands of pounds were subscribed to the cause, and the names of Sir Richard Cobden and John Bright became famous as leaders in the righteous cause of untaxed food for the people. John Bright's account of how he became interested in the movement and associated himself with Cobden in the work, told in a speech made at Rochdale, gives a vivid picture of the human side of the problem which by the conservatives of the day was treated as a merely political issue:

"In the year 1841 I was at Leamington and spent several months there. It was near the middle of September there fell upon me one of the heaviest blows that can visit any man. I found myself living there with none living of my

house but a motherless child. Mr. Cobden called upon me the day after that event, so terrible to me and so prostrating. He said, after some conversation, 'Don't allow this grief, great as it is, to weigh you down too much. There are at this moment in thousands of homes in this country wives and children who are dying of hunger — of hunger made by the law. If you come along with me, we will never rest till we have got rid of the Corn Law.' We saw the colossal injustice which cast its shadow over every part of the nation, and we thought we saw the true remedy and the relief, and that if we united our efforts, as you know we did, with the efforts of hundreds and thousands of good men in various parts of the country, we should be able to bring that remedy home, and to afford that relief to the starving people of this country."

The movement thus inaugurated was, as Molesworth declares, "without parallel in the history of the world for the energy with which it was conducted, the rapid advance it made, and the speedy and complete success that crowned its efforts; for the great change it wrought in public opinion and the consequent legislation of the country; overcoming prejudice and passion, dispelling ignorance and conquering powerful interests, with no other weapons than those of reason and that eloquence which great truths and strong conviction inspire."

A signal victory for the League was gained in 1843, when the London *Times*, which up to that time had regarded the League with

suspicion and even alarm, suddenly turned round and ranged itself with the advancing tide of progress by declaring, "The League is a great fact. It would be foolish, nay, rash, to deny its importance. It is a great fact that there should have been created in the homestead of our manufacturers (Manchester) a confederacy devoted to the agitation of one political question, persevering at it year after year, shrinking from no trouble, dismayed at no danger, making light of every obstacle. It demonstrates the hardy strength of purpose, the indomitable will, by which Englishmen working together for a great object are armed and animated."

The final victory, however, did not come until three years later, when Sir Robert Peel, who became Prime Minister to defend the Corn Laws, announced that he had been completely convinced of their injustice, and that he was an "absolute convert to the free-trade principle, and that the introduction of the principle into all departments of our commercial legislation was, according to his intention, to be a mere question of time and convenience." This was in January, 1845, and shortly after, June, 1846, the bill for the total repeal of the Corn Laws passed the House.

How much longer it might have been before the opposition was carried is a question if it had not been for the failure of the grain crops and the widespread potato disease which plunged Ireland into a state of famine, and threatened the whole country with more or less of disaster.

Even when this state of affairs became apparent in the summer of 1845 there was still much delay. The Cabinet met and discussed and discussed; still Parliament was not assembled; and then it was that the Mansion House Relief Committee of Dublin drew up resolutions stating that famine and pestilence were approaching throughout the land, and impeaching the conduct of the Ministry for not opening the ports or calling Parliament together.

But still Peel, already won over, could not take his Cabinet with him; he was forced to resign. Lord John Russell was called to form a ministry, but failed, when Peel was recalled, and the day was carried.

Browning's brief but pertinent allusion to this struggle in "The Englishman in Italy" shows clearly how strongly his sympathies were with the League and how disgusted he was with the procrastination of Parliament in taking a perfectly obvious step for the betterment of the people.

"Fortnu, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn laws
Be righteous and wise
If 't were proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies!"

An occasional allusion or poem like this makes us aware from time to time of Browning's constant sympathy with any movement which meant good to the masses. Even if he had not written near the end of his life "Why I am a Liberal," there could be no doubt in any one's mind of his political ideals. In "The Lost Leader" is perhaps his strongest utterance upon the subject. The fact that it was called out by Wordsworth's lapse into conservatism after the horrors of the French Revolution had brought him and his *sans culotte* brethren, Southey and Coleridge, to pause, a fact very possibly freshened in Browning's mind by Wordsworth's receiving a pension in 1842 and the poet-laureateship in 1843, does not affect the force of the poem as a personal utterance on the side of democracy. Browning, himself, considered the poem far too fierce as a portrayal of Wordsworth's case.* He evidently forgot Wordsworth, and thought only of a renegade

*See the author's "Browning's England."

liberal as he went on with the poem. It was written the same year that there occurred the last attempt to postpone the passing of the Anti-Corn Law Bill, when the intensity of feeling on the part of all who believed in progress was at its height, and the bare thought of a deserter from Liberal ranks would be enough to exasperate any man who had the nation's welfare at heart. That Browning's feeling at the time reached the point not only of exasperation but of utmost scorn for any one who was not on the liberal side is shown most forcibly in the bitter lines:

"Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devil's triumph and sorrow for angels,
One more wrong to man, one more insult to God!"

Browning speaks of having thought of Wordsworth at an unlucky juncture.

Whatever the exact episode which called forth the poem may have been, we are safe in saying that at a time when Disraeli was attacking Sir Robert Peel because of his honesty in avowing his conversion to free trade, and because of his bravery in coming out from his party, in breaking up his cabinet and regardless of all costs in determining to carry the bill or resign, and finally carrying

it in the face of the greatest odds — at such a time, when a great conservative leader had shown himself capable of being won over to a great liberal principle; the spectacle of a deserter from the cause, and that deserter a member of one's own brotherhood of poets, would be especially hard to bear.

One feels a little like asking why did not Browning let his enthusiasm carry him for once into a contemporary expression of admiration for Sir Robert Peel? Perhaps the tortuous windings of parliamentary proceedings obscured to a near view the true greatness of Peel's action.

The year of this great change in England's policy was the year of Robert Browning's marriage and his departure for Italy, where he lived for fifteen years. During this time and for some years after his return to England there is no sign that he was taking any interest in the political affairs of his country. Human character under romantic conditions in a social environment, or the thought problems of the age, as we have already seen, occupied his attention, and for the subject matter of these he more often than not went far afield from his native country.

In "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau" is the poet's first deliberate portrayal of a person

of contemporary prominence in the political world. The alliance of Napoleon III with England brought his policy of government into strong contrast with that of the liberal leaders in English politics, a contrast which had been emphasized through Lord Palmerston's sympathy with the *coup d'état.*

The news of the manner in which Louis Napoleon had carried out his policy of smashing the French constitution caused horror and consternation in England, and the Queen at once gave instructions that nothing should be done by her ambassador in Paris which could be in any way construed as an interference in the internal affairs of France. Already, however, Lord Palmerston had expressed to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs his entire approbation in the act of Napoleon and his conviction that he could not have acted otherwise than as he had done. When this was known, the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, wrote Palmerston a letter, causing his resignation, which was accepted very willingly by the Queen. The letter was as follows:

"While I concur in the foreign policy of which you have been the adviser, and much as I admire the energy and ability with which it has been carried into effect, I cannot but observe that misunderstandings perpetually renewed, violations

of prudence and decorum too frequently repeated, have marred the effects which ought to have followed from a sound policy and able admirers. I am, therefore, most reluctantly compelled to come to the conclusion that the conduct of foreign affairs can no longer be left in your hands with advantage to the country."

When England's fears that Louis Napoleon would emulate his illustrious predecessor and invade her shores were allayed, her attitude was modified. She forgot the horrors of the *coup d'état* and formed an alliance with him, and her hospitable island became his refuge in his downfall.

A prominent figure in European politics for many years, Louis Napoleon had just that combination of greatness and mediocrity which would appeal to Browning's love of a human problem. Furthermore, Napoleon was brought very directly to the poet's notice through his Italian campaign and Mrs. Browning's interest in the political crisis in Italy, which found expression in her fine group of Italian patriotic poems.

The question has been asked, "Will the unbiased judgment of posterity allow to Louis Napoleon some extenuating circumstances, or will it pronounce an unqualified condemnation upon the man who, for the sake of consolidating his own power and

strengthening his corrupt government, spilled the blood of no less than a hundred thousand Frenchmen?"

When all Europe was putting to itself some such question as this, and answering it with varying degrees of leniency, Browning conceived the idea of making Napoleon speak for himself, and at the same time he added what purports to be the sort of criticism of him indulged in by a Thiers or a Victor Hugo. The interest of the poem centers in Napoleon's own vindication of himself as portrayed by Browning. What Browning wrote of the poem in a letter to a friend in 1872 explains fully his aim, as well as showing by indirection, at least, how much he was interested in political affairs at this time, though so little of this interest crops out in his poetry: "I think in the main he meant to do what I say, and but for weakness — grown more apparent in his last years than formerly — would have done what I say he did not. I thought badly of him at the beginning of his career, *et pour cause;* better afterward, on the strength of the promises he made and gave indications of intending to redeem. I think him very weak in the last miserable year. At his worst I prefer him to Thiers's best." At another time he wrote: "I am

glad you like what the editor of the *Edinburgh* calls my eulogium on the Second Empire, which it is not, any more than what another wiseacre affirms it to be, 'a scandalous attack on the old constant friend of England.' It is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say for himself."

Browning depicts the man as perfectly conscious of his own limitations. He recognizes that he is not the genius, nor the creator of a new order of things, but that his power lies in his faculty of taking an old ideal and improving upon it. He contends that in following out his special gifts as a conservator he is doing just what God intended him to do, and as to his method of doing it that is his own affair. God gives him the commission and leaves it to his human faculties to carry it out, not inquiring what these are, but simply asking at the end if the commission has been accomplished.

Once admit these two things — namely, that his nature, though not of the highest, is such as God gave him, and his lack of responsibility in regard to any moral ideal, so that he accomplishes the purpose of this nature — and a loophole is given for any inconsistencies he may choose to indulge in in bringing about that strengthening of an old ideal in

which he believes. The old ideal is, of course, the monarchical principle of government, administered, however, in such a manner that it will be for the good of society in all its complex manifestations of to-day. His notion of society's good consists in a balancing of all its forces, secured by the smoothing down of any extreme tendencies, each having its orbit marked but no more, so that none shall impede the other's path.

> "In this wide world — though each and all alike,
> Save for [him] fain would spread itself through space
> And leave its fellow not an inch of way."

Browning makes him indulge in a curiously sophisticated view of the relativity of good and evil in the course of his argument, to the effect that since there is a further good conceivable beyond the utmost earth can realize, therefore to change the agency — the evil whereby good is brought about, try to make good do good as evil does — would be just as foolish as if a chemist wanting white and knowing that black ingredients were needed to make the dye insisted these should be white, too. A bad world is that which he experiences and approves. A good world he does not want in which there would be no pity, courage, hope, fear, sorrow, joy — devoted-

ness, in short — which he believes form the ultimate allowed to man; therefore it has been his policy not to do away with the evil in the society he is saving. To mitigate, not to cure, has been his aim.

Browning would, himself, answer the sophistry, here, by showing that evil though permitted by divine power was only a means of good through man's working against whatever he conceives to be evil with the whole strength of his being. To deliberately follow the policy of conserving evil would be in the end to annihilate the good. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau could not see so far as this.

It is not astonishing that with such a policy as this his methods of carrying it out might seem somewhat dubious if not positively criminal. His departure from his early idealism is excused for the reason that idealism is not practicable when the region of talk is left for the real action of life. Every step in his own aggrandizement is apologized for on the ground that what needed to be accomplished could only be done by a strong hand and that strong hand his own. He was in fact an unprincipled utilitarian as Browning presents him, who spoiled even what virtue resides in utilitarianism by letting his care for saving society be too much influenced

by his desire for personal glory. One ideal undertaking he permitted himself, the freeing of Italy from the Austrian yoke. But he was not strong enough for any such high flight of idealism, as the sequel proved.

Browning does not bring out in the poem the Emperor's real reasons for stopping short in the Italian campaign, which certainly were sufficient from a practical standpoint, but as Archibald Forbes says in his "Life of Napoleon," should have been thought of before he published his program of freedom to Italy "from the Alps to the Adriatic." "Even when he addressed the Italians at Milan," continues Forbes, "the new light had not broken in upon him which revealed the strength of the quadrilateral, the cost of expelling the Austrians from Venetia, and the conviction that further French successes would certainly bring mobilized Germany into the field. That new light seems to have flashed upon Napoleon for the first time from the stern Austrian ranks on the day of Solferino. It was then he realized that should he go forward he would be obliged to attack in front an enemy entrenched behind great fortresses, and protected against any diversion on his flanks by the neutrality of the territories surrounding him."

Mrs. Browning, whose consternation and grief over Villafranca broke out in burning verse, yet made a defence of Napoleon's action here which might have been worked into Browning's poem with advantage. She wrote to John Foster that while Napoleon's intervention in Italy overwhelmed her with joy it did not dazzle her into doubts as to the motive of it, "but satisfied a patient expectation and fulfilled a logical inference. Thus it did not present itself to my mind as a caprice of power, to be followed perhaps by an onslaught on Belgium and an invasion of England. Have we not watched for a year while every saddle of iniquity has been tried on the Napoleonic back, and nothing fitted? Wasn't he to crush Piedmontese institutions like so many eggshells? Was he ever going away with his army, and hadn't he occupied houses in Genoa with an intention of bombarding the city? Didn't he keep troops in the north after Villafranca on purpose to come down on us with a grand duke or a Kingdom of Etruria and Plon-Plon to rule it? And wouldn't he give back Bologna to the Pope? . . . Were not Cipriani, Farini and other patriots his 'mere creatures' in treacherous correspondence with the Tuileries 'doing his dirty work'?" Of such accusations

as these the intelligent English journals were full, but she maintains that against "The Inane and Immense Absurd" from which they were born is to be set "a nation saved." She realized also how hard Napoleon's position in France must be to maintain "forty thousand priests with bishops of the color of Monseigneur d'Orleans and company, having, of course, a certain hold on the agricultural population which forms so large a part of the basis of the imperial throne. Then add to that the parties who use this Italian question as a weapon simply."

Many of Napoleon's own statements have furnished Browning with the arguments used in the apology. After deliberately destroying the constitution, for example, and himself being the cause of the violence and bloodshed in Paris, he coolly addressed the people in the following strain, in which we certainly recognize Hohenstiel-Schwangau:

"Frenchmen! the disturbances are appeased. Whatever may be the decision of the people, society is saved. The first part of my task is accomplished. The appeal to the nation, for the purpose of terminating the struggle of parties, I knew would not cause any serious risk to the public tranquillity. Why should the people have risen against me? If I do

not any longer possess your confidence — if your ideas are changed — there is no occasion to make precious blood flow; it will be sufficient to place an adverse vote in the urn. I shall always respect the decision of the people."

His cleverness in combining the idea of authority with that of the idea of obeying the will of the people is curiously illustrated in his speech at the close of his dictatorship, during which it must be confessed that he had done excellently well for the country — so well, indeed, that even the socialists were ready to cry "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

"While watching me reëstablish the institutions and reawaken the memories of the Empire, people have repeated again and again that I wished to reconstitute the Empire itself. If this had been so the transformation would have been accomplished long ago; neither the means nor the opportunities would have been lacking. . . . But I have remained content with that I had. Resolved now, as heretofore, to do all in my power for France and nothing for myself, I would accept any modification of the present state of things only if forced by necessity. . . . If parties remain quiet, nothing shall be changed. But if they endeavor to sap the foundations of my government; if they deny the legitimacy of the result of the popular vote; if, in short, they continually put the future of the country in jeopardy, then, but only then, it might be prudent to ask the people for a new title which would irrevocably fix on my head the power with which they have already clothed me. But let us not antici-

pate difficulties; let us preserve the Republic. Under its banner I am anxious to inaugurate once more an epoch of reconciliation and pardon; and I call on all without distinction who will frankly coöperate with me for the public good."

In contrast to such fair-sounding phrases Napoleon was capable of the most dishonorable tactics in order to gain his ends. Witness the episode of his tempting Bismarck with offers of an alliance against Austria at the same time that he was treating secretly with Francis Joseph for the cession of Venetia in return for Silesia. And while negotiating secretly and separately with these two sworn enemies, he pretended to be so disinterested as to suggest the submission of their quarrel to a European congress.

Browning has certainly presented a good portrait of the man as the history of his own utterances contrasted with the history of his actions proves. In trying to bridge with this apology the discrepancies between the two he has, however, attributed to Louis Napoleon a degree of self-consciousness beyond any ever evinced by him. The principle of imperialism was a conviction with him. That he desired to help the people of France and to a great extent succeeded, is true; that he combined with this desire the desire of

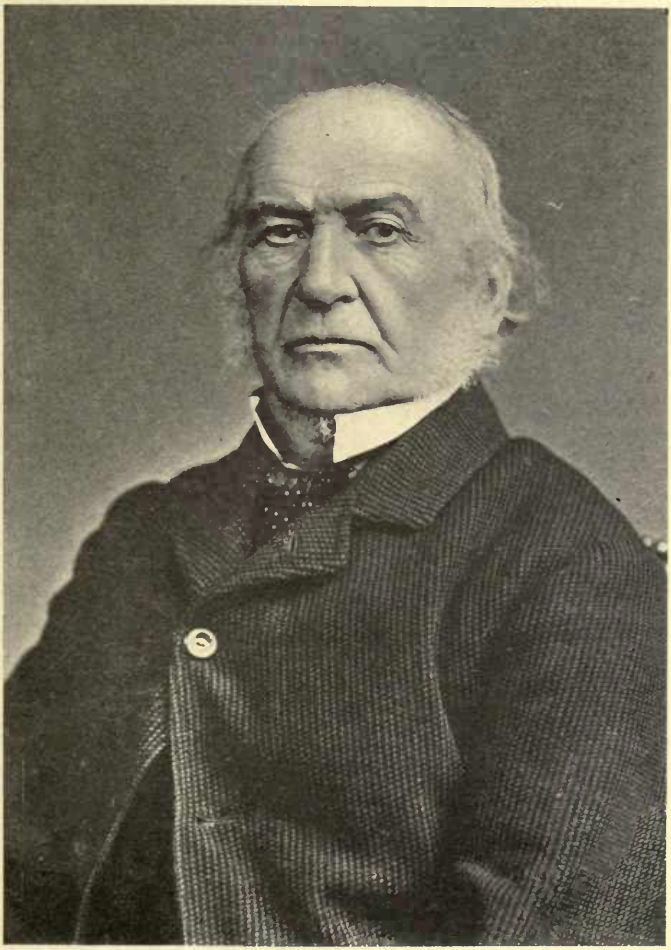
power for himself is true; that he used unscrupulous means to gain whatever end he desired when such were necessary is true; but that he was conscious of his own despicable traits to the extent that the poet makes him conscious of them is most unlikely. Nor is it likely that he would defend himself upon any such subtle ground as that his character and temperament being the gift of God he was bound to follow out his nature in order that God's purposes might be accomplished. It is rather an explanation of his life from the philosopher's or psychologist's standpoint than a self-conscious revelation. It is none the less interesting on this account, while the scene setting gives it a thoroughly human and dramatic touch.

Whatever may be said of Napoleon himself, his rule was fraught with consequences of import for the whole of Europe, not because of what he was, but because of what he was not. He was an object lesson on the fallacy of trying to govern so that all parties will be pleased by autocratically keeping each one from fully expressing itself. The result is that each grows more aware of the suppression than of the amount of freedom allowed to it, and nobody is pleased. When added to such a policy as this is the surmounting desire for

power and the Machiavellian determination to attain it by any means, fair or foul, a principle of statecraft which by the middle of the century could not be practised in its most acute form without arousing the most severe criticism, his power carried within it the seeds of destruction.

It has been said that "never in the history of the world has one man undertaken a task more utterly beyond the power of mortal man than that which Louis Napoleon was pledged to carry through." He professed to be at one and the same time the elect sovereign of the people, a son of the revolution, a champion of universal suffrage, and an adversary of the demagogues. In the first of these characters he was bound to justify his elevation by economic and social reforms, in his second character he had to destroy the last trace of political liberty. He had, in fact, assumed various utterly incompatible attitudes, and the day that the masses found themselves deceived in their expectations, and the middle classes found their interests were betrayed, reaction was inevitable.

In spite of his heinous faults, however, historians have grown more and more inclined to admit that Napoleon filled for a time a necessary niche in the line of progress, just



William Ewart Gladstone

that step which Browning makes him say the genius will recognize that he fills — namely, to

"Carry the incompleteness on a stage,
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,
And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,
It will not prove the worst achievement, sure
In the eyes at least of one man, one I look
Nowise to catch in critic company:
To-wit, the man inspired, the genius, self
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.
He, at least, finds his business simplified,
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time
We live in, and I work on, and transmit
To such successor: he will operate
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine."

That is, at a time when Europe was seething with the idea of a new order, in which the ideal of nationality was to take the place of such decaying ideas as the divine right of kings, balance of power, and so on, Napoleon held on to these ideas just long enough to prevent a general disintegration of society. He held in his hands the balance of power until the nations began to find themselves, and in the case of Italy actually helped on the triumph of the new order.

It is interesting to note in this connection that one of the principal factors in the making of Gladstone into the stanch liberal which

he became was the freeing of Italy, in which Napoleon had so large a share. Gladstone himself wrote in 1892 of the events which occurred in the fifth decade: "Of the various and important incidents which associated me almost unawares with foreign affairs . . . I will only say that they all contributed to forward the action of those home causes more continuous in their operation, which, without in any way effacing my old sense of reverence for the past, determined for me my place in the present and my direction toward the future." In 1859 Gladstone dined with Cavour at Turin, when the latter had the opportunity of explaining his position and policy to the man whom he considered "one of the sincerest and most important friends that Italy had." But as his biographer says, Gladstone was still far from the glorified democracy of the Mazzinian propaganda, and expressed his opinion that England should take the stand that she would be glad if Italian unity proved feasible, "but the conditions of it must be gradually matured by a course of improvement in the several states, and by the political education of the people; if it cannot be reached by these means, it hardly will by any others; and certainly not by opinions which closely link Italian reconstruction with European dis-

organization and general war." Yet he was as distressed as Mrs. Browning at the peace of Villafranca, about which he wrote: "I little thought to have lived to see the day when the conclusion of a peace should in my own mind cause disgust rather than impart relief." By the end of the year he thought better of Napoleon and expressed himself again somewhat in the same strain as Mrs. Browning, to the effect that the Emperor had shown, "though partial and inconsistent, indications of a genuine feeling for the Italians — and far beyond this he has committed himself very considerably to the Italian cause in the face of the world. When in reply to all that, we fling in his face the truce of Villafranca, he may reply — and the answer is not without force — that he stood single-handed in a cause when any moment Europe might have stood combined against him. We gave him verbal sympathy and encouragement, or at least criticism; no one else gave him anything at all. No doubt he showed then that he had undertaken a work to which his powers were unequal; but I do not think that, when fairly judged, he can be said to have given proof by that measure of insincerity or indifference."

Gladstone's gradual and forceful emancipa-

tion into the ranks of the liberals may be followed in the fascinating pages of Morley's "Life," who at the end declares that his performances in the sphere of active government were beyond comparison. Gladstone's own summary of his career gives a glimpse of what these performances were as well as an interpretation of the century and England's future growth which indicate that had he had another twenty years in which to progress, perhaps fewer, he would beyond all doubt have become an out and out social democrat.

"The public aspect of the period which closes for me with the fourteen years (so I love to reckon them) of my formal connection with Midlothian is too important to pass without a word. I consider it as beginning with the Reform Act of Lord Grey's government. That great act was for England, improvement and extension: for Scotland it was political birth, the beginning of a duty and a power, neither of which had attached to the Scottish nation in the preceding period. I rejoice to think how the solemnity of that duty has been recognized, and how that power has been used. The threescore years offer as the pictures of what the historian will recognize as a great legislative and administrative period — perhaps, on the whole, the greatest in our annals. It has been predominantly a history of emancipation — that is, of enabling man to do his work of emancipation, political, economical, social, moral, intellectual. Not numerous merely, but almost numberless, have been the causes brought to issue, and in every one of them I rejoice

to think that, so far as my knowledge goes, Scotland has done battle for the right.

"Another period has opened and is opening still — a period possibly of yet greater moral dangers, certainly a great ordeal for those classes which are now becoming largely conscious of power, and never heretofore subject to its deteriorating influences. These have been confined in their actions to the classes above them, because they were its sole possessors. Now is the time for the true friend of his country to remind the masses that their present political elevation is owing to no principles less broad and noble than these — the love of liberty, of liberty for all without distinction of class, creed or country, *and the resolute preference of the interests of the whole* to any interest, be it what it may, of a narrower scope."

Mr. Gladstone entered Parliament at twenty-three, in 1832, and a year later Browning, at twenty-one, printed his first poem, "Pauline." The careers of the two men ran nearly parallel, for Browning died in 1889, on the day of the publication of his last volume of poems, and Gladstone's retirement from active life took place in 1894, shortly after the defeat of his second Home Rule Bill. Though there is nothing to show that these two men came into touch with each other during their life, and while it is probable that Browning would not have been in sympathy with many of the aspects of Gladstone's mentality, there is an undercurrent of simi-

larity in their attitude of mind toward reform. The passage in "Sordello" already referred to, written in 1840, might be regarded almost as a prophecy of the sort of leader Gladstone became. I have said of that passage that it expressed the ideal of the opportunist, not that of the revolutionary. Opportunist Mr. Gladstone was often called by captious critics, but any unbiased reader following his career now as a whole will see, as Morley points out, that whenever there was a chance of getting anything done it was generally found that he was the only man with courage and resolution enough to attempt it.

A distinction should be made between that sort of opportunism which *waits* upon the growth of conditions favorable to the taking of a short step in amelioration, and what might be called militant opportunism, which, at all times, seizes every opportunity to take a step in the direction of an evolving, all-absorbing ideal. Is not this the opportunism of both a Browning and a Gladstone? Such a policy at least tacitly acknowledges that the law of evolution is the law that should be followed, and that the mass of the people as well as the leader have their share in the unfolding of the coming ideal, though their part in it may be less conscious than his and

though they may need his leadership to make the steps by the way clear.

The other political leader of the Victorian era with whom Gladstone came most constantly into conflict was Disraeli, of whom Browning in "George Bubb Dodington" has given a sketch in order to draw a contrast between the unsuccessful policy of a charlatan of the Dodington type and that of one like Disraeli. The skeptical multitude of to-day cannot be taken in by declarations that the politician is working only for their good, and if he frankly acknowledged that he is working also for his own good they would have none of him. The nice point to be decided is how shall he work for his own good and yet gain control of the multitude. Dodington did not know the secret, but according to Browning Disraeli did, and what is the secret? It seems to be an attitude of absolute self-assurance, a disregard of consistency, a scorn of the people he is dealing with, and a pose suggesting the play of supernatural forces in his life.

This is a true enough picture of the real Disraeli, who seems to have had a leaning toward a belief in spiritualism, and who was notorious for his unblushing changes of opinion and for a style of oratory in which his

points were made by clever invective and sarcasm hurled at his opponents instead of by any sound, logical argument, it being, indeed one of his brilliant discoveries that "wisdom ought to be concealed under folly, and consistency under caprice."

Many choice bits of history might be given in illustration of Browning's portrayal of him; for example, speaking against reform, he exclaims: "Behold the late Prime Minister and the Reform Ministry! The spirited and snow-white steeds have gradually changed into an equal number of sullen and obstinate donkeys, while Mr. Merryman, who, like the Lord Chancellor, was once the very life of the ring, now lies his despairing length in the middle of the stage, with his jokes exhausted and his bottle empty."

As a specimen of his quickness in retort may be cited an account of an episode which occurred at the time when he came out as the champion of the Taunton Blues. In the course of his speech he "enunciated," says an anonymous writer of the fifties, "one of those daring historical paradoxes which are so signally characteristic of the man: 'Twenty years ago' said the Taunton Blue hero, 'tithes were paid in Ireland more regularly than now!'

"Even his supporters appeared astounded by this declaration.

"'How do you know?' shouted an elector.

"'I have read it,' replied Mr. Disraeli.

"'Oh, oh!' exclaimed the elector.

"'I know it,' retorted Disraeli, 'because I have read, and you' (looking daggers at his questioner) 'have not.'

"This was considered a very happy rejoinder by the friends of the candidate, and was loudly cheered by the Blues.

"'Didn't you write a novel?' again asked the importunate elector, not very much frightened even by Mr. Disraeli's oratorical thunder and the sardonical expression on his face.

"'I have certainly written a novel,' Mr. Disraeli replied; 'but I hope there is no disgrace in being connected with literature.'

"'You are a curiosity of literature, you are,' said the humorous elector.

"'I hope,' said Mr. Disraeli, with great indignation, 'there is no disgrace in having written that which has been read by hundreds of thousands of my fellow-countrymen, and which has been translated into every European language. I trust that one who is an author by the gift of nature may be as good a man as one who is Master of the Mint by the gift

of Lord Melbourne.' Great applause then burst forth from the Blues. Mr. Disraeli continued, 'I am not, however, the puppet of the Duke of Buckingham, as one newspaper has described me; while a fellow laborer in the same vineyard designated me the next morning, "the Marleybone Radical." If there is anything on which I figure myself it is my consistency.'

"'Oh, oh!' exclaimed many hearers.

"'I am prepared to prove it,' said Mr. Disraeli, with menacing energy. 'I am prepared to prove it, and always shall be, either in the House of Commons or on the hustings, considering the satisfactory manner in which I have been attacked, but I do not think the attack will be repeated.'"

It seems extraordinary that such tactics of bluff could take a man onward to the supreme place of Prime Minister. Possibly it was just as much owing to his power to amuse as to any of the causes brought out by Browning. Is there anything the majority of mankind loves more than a laugh?

The conflicts of Disraeli and Gladstone form one of the most remarkable episodes of nineteenth-century politics. One is tempted to draw a parallel between Napoleon III and Disraeli, whose tactics were much the same,

except that Disraeli was backed up by a much keener intellect. Possibly he held a part in English politics similar to that held by Napoleon in European politics — that is, he conserved the influences of the past long enough to make the future more sure of itself. Browning, however, evidently considered him nothing more than a successful charlatan.

When Browning wrote, "Why I Am a Liberal," in 1885, liberalism in English politics had reached its climax in the nineteenth century through the introduction by Mr. Gladstone, then Premier for the third time, of his Home Rule Bill. The injustices suffered by the Irish people and the horrible atrocities resulting from these had had their effect upon Mr. Gladstone and had taken him the last great step in his progress toward freedom. The meeting at which this bill was introduced has been described as the greatest legislative assembly of modern times. The House was full to overflowing, and in a brilliant speech of nearly four hours the veteran leader held his audience breathless as he unfolded his plans for the betterment of Irish conditions. We are told that during the debates that followed there was a remarkable exhibition of feeling — "the passions, the enthusiasm, the fear, and hope, and fury and

exultation, sweeping, now the surface, now stirring to its depths the great gathering." The bill, which included, besides the founding of an Irish Parliament in Dublin, which would have the power to deal with all matters "save the Crown, the Army and Navy, Foreign and Colonial Policy, Trade, Navigation, Currency, Imperial Taxation, and the Endowment of Churches," also provided that Ireland should annually contribute to the English exchequer the sum of £3,243,000.

Eloquence, enthusiasm, exultation — all came to naught. The bill did not even suit the liberals, the bargain from a financial point of view being regarded as hard. It was defeated in Parliament and fared no better when an appeal was made to the country, and Mr. Gladstone resigned. In nine months, however, a general election returned him to office again, and again he introduced a Home Rule Bill, and though it passed the Commons, it was overwhelmingly defeated in the House of Lords.

It is pleasant to reflect that in this last act of a noble and brilliant career spent in the interests of the ever-growing ideals of democracy Gladstone had the sympathy of Browning, shown by his emphatic expression of "liberal sentiments" at a momentous crisis,

when a speech on the liberal side even from the mouth of a poet counted for much.

As we have seen, the reflections in Browning's poetry of his interest in public affairs are comparatively few, yet such glimpses as he has given prove him, beyond all doubt, to have been a democrat in principle, to have arrived, in fact, at the beginning of his career at a point beyond that attained by England's rulers at the end of the century. This far-sighted vision of his may have been another reason to be added to those mentioned at the beginning of the chapter why his interest in the practical affairs of his country did not more often express itself. The wrangling, the inconsequentialness, the eloquence expended upon mere personal interests which make up by far the larger proportion of all political agitation, are irritating to the last degree to a man of vision. His part was that of the philosopher and artist — to watch and to record in the portrayal of his many characters the underlying principle of freedom, which was the guiding star in all his work.

IV

SOCIAL IDEALS

BROWNING'S social ideals revolve about a trinity of values: the value of love, the value of truth, the value of evil. His ethics are the natural outgrowth of his mysticism and his idealism, with no touch of the utilitarianism which has been a distinctive mark of the fabric of English society during the nineteenth century, nor, on the other hand, of the hidebound conventionalism which has limited personal freedom in ways detrimental to just those aspects of social morality it was most anxious to preserve.

The fact of which Browning seemed more conscious than of any other fact of his existence, and which, as we have seen, was the very core of his mysticism, was feeling. Things about which an ordinary man would feel no emotion at all start in his mind a train of thoughts, ending only in the perception of divine love. The eating of a palatable fig fills his heart with such gratefulness to the giver of the fig that immediately he fares

forth upon the way which brings him into the presence of the Prime Giver from whom all gifts are received. What ecstasy of feeling in the artist aspiring through his art to the higher regions of Absolute Beauty in "Abt Vogler" of the poet who loves, aspiring to the divine through his human love in the epilogue to "Ferishtah's Fancies!" The perception of feeling was so intense that it became in him exalted and concentrated, incapable of dissipating itself in ephemeral sentimentalities, and this it is which gives feeling to Browning its mystical quality, and puts personal love upon the plane of a veritable revelation.

Though reports have often floated about in regard to his attachments to other women after Mrs. Browning's death, the fact remains that he did not marry again, that he wrote the lyrics in "Ferishtah's Fancies," and the sonnet to Edward Fitzgerald just before his death, and thirty years after his wife's death. Moreover, in the epilogue to "The Two Poets of Croisic" he gives a hint of what might be his attitude toward any other women who may have come into his life, in the application of the tale of the cricket chirping "love" in the place of the broken string of a poet's lyre—

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike — one string that made
Love sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,——

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered,
'Love, Love, Love,' when'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

These rare qualities of constancy, exaltation and aspiration, in love sublimating it into a spiritual emotion, which was evidently the distinctive mark of Browning's personality on the emotional side, furnishes the keynote by which his presentation or solution of the social problems involved in the relations of men and women is always to be gauged.

He had been writing ten years when he essayed his first serious presentation of what we might to-day call a problem play on an English subject in "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon." In all of his long poems and in many of his short ones personal love had been portrayed under various conditions — between friends or lovers, husband and wife,

or father and son, and in every instance it is a dominating influence in the action, as we have already seen it to be in "Strafford." Again, in "King Victor and King Charles" the action centers upon Charles's love for his father, and is also moulded in many ways by Polyxena's love for her husband, Charles.

But a perception of the possible heights to be obtained by the passion of romantic love only fully emerges in "Pippa Passes," for example in Ottima's vision of the reality of her own love, despite her great sin as contrasted with that of Sebald's, and in Jules's rising above the conventionally low when he discovers he has been duped, and perceiving in Phene a purity of soul which no earthly conditions had been able to sully,

> "Who, what is Lutwyche, what Natalia's friends,
> What the whole world except our love — my own,
> Own Phene? . . .
> I do but break these paltry models up
> To begin art afresh . . .
> Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
> Like a god going through the world there stands
> One mountain for a moment in the dusk,
> Whole brotherhoods of cedars on its brow:
> And you are ever by me while I gaze
> — Are in my arms as now — as now — as now!
> Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
> Some unsuspected isle in far-off seas!"

Again, in "The Return of the Druses" there is a complicated clash between the ideal of religious reverence for the incarnation of divinity in Djabal and human love for him in the soul of Anael, resulting at the end in the destruction of the idea of Djabal's supernatural divinity, and his reinstatement perceived by Anael as divine through the complete exaltation of his human love for Anael.

These examples, however, while they illustrate Browning's attitude toward human love, are far enough removed from nineteenth-century conditions in England. In "Pippa," the social conditions of nineteenth-century Italy are reflected; in "The Druses," the religious conditions of the Druse nation in the fifteenth century.

In the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon" a situation is developed which comes home forcibly to the nineteenth-century Englishman despite the fact that the scene is supposed to be laid in the eighteenth century. The poet's treatment of the clash between the ideal, cherished by an old and honored aristocratic family of its own immaculate purity, and the spontaneous, complete and exalted love of the two young people who in their ecstasy transcend conventions, illustrates, as perhaps no

other situation could, his reverential attitude upon the subject of love. Gwendolen, the older, intuitional woman, and Mertoun, the young lover, are the only people in the play to realize that purity may exist although the social enactments upon which it is supposed to depend have not been complied with. Tresham learns it only when he has wounded Mertoun unto death; Mildred never learns it. The grip of conventional teaching has sunk so deeply into her nature that she feels her sin unpardonable and only to be atoned for by death. Mertoun, as he dies, gives expression to the essential purity and truth of his nature in these words:

"Die along with me,
Dear Mildred! 'tis so easy, and you'll 'scape
So much unkindness! Can I lie at rest,
With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds
Done to you? — heartless men shall have my heart
And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,
Aware, perhaps, of every blow — O God! —
Upon those lips — yet of no power to bear
The felon stripe by stripe! Die Mildred! Leave
Their honorable world to them! For God
We're good enough, though the world casts us out."

This is only one of many instances which go to show that Browning's conception of love might include, on the one hand, a com-

plete freedom from the trammels imposed upon it by conventional codes of morality, but on the other, was so real and permanent a sympathy between two souls, and so absolute a revelation of divine beauty, that its morality far transcended that of the conventional codes, which under the guise of lawful alliances permit and even encourage marriages based upon the most external of attractions, or those entered into for merely social or commercial reasons. A sin against love seems in Browning's eyes to come the nearest of all human failings to the unpardonable sin.

It must not be supposed from what has been said that he had any anarchistic desire to do away with the solemnization of marriage, but his eyes were wide open to the fact that there might be sin within the marriage bond, and just as surely that there might be love pure and true outside of it.

Another illustration of Browning's belief in the existence of a love such as Shakespeare describes, which looks on tempests and is never shaken, is given in the "Inn Album." Here, again, the characters are all English, and the story is based upon an actual occurrence. Such changes as Browning has

made in the story are with the intention of pitting against the villainy of an aristocratic seducer of the lowest type a bourgeois young man, who has been in love with the betrayed woman, and who when he finds out that it was this man, his friend, who had stood between them, does not swerve from his loyalty and truth to her, and in the end avenges her by killing the aristocratic villain. The young man is betrothed to a girl he cares nothing for, the woman has married a man she cares nothing for. All is of no moment in the presence of a genuine loyal emotion which shows itself capable of a life of devotion with no thought of reward.

Browning has nowhere translated into more noble action the love of a man than in the passage where the hero of the story gives himself unselfishly to the woman who has been so deeply wronged:

"Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now, you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared —
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?

Only wait! only let me serve — deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will — perhaps the power — at least
Means that have power against the world. Fortune —
Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound — in marriage, say — why, still,
Still, sure, there's something for a friend to do,
Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him
Pass freely, — and you need not look, much less
Fling me a '*Thank you! — are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now, at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile! '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap — leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there's after all,
Worst come to worst — if still there somehow be
The shame — I said was no shame, — none, I swear! —
In that case, if my hand and what it holds, —
My name, — might be your safeguard now, — at once —
Why, here's the hand — you have the heart."

The genuine lovers in Browning's gallery will occur to every reader of Browning: lovers who are not deterred by obstacles, like Norbert, lovers like Miranda, devoted to a woman with a "past"; like the lover in "One Way of Love," who still can say, "Those who win heaven, blest are they." Sometimes there

is a problem to be solved, sometimes not. Whenever there is a problem, however, it is solved by Browning on the side of sincerity and truth, never on the side of convention.

Take, for example, "The Statue and the Bust," which many have considered to uphold an immoral standard and of which its defenders declare that the moral point of the story lies not in the fact that the lady and the Duke wished to elope with each other but that they never had strength enough of mind to do so. Considering what an entirely conventional and loveless marriage this of the lady and the Duke evidently was we cannot suppose, in the light of Browning's solution of similar situations, that he would have thought it any great crime if the Duke and the lady had eloped, since there was so genuine an attraction between them. But he does word his climax, it must be confessed, in a way to leave a loophole of doubt on the subject for those who do not like to be scandalized by their Browning: "Let a man contend to the uttermost for his life's set prize, be it what it will!"

There is a saving grace to be extracted from the last line.

"— The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is — the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say."

In "The Ring and the Book," the problem is similar to that in the "Inn Album," except that the villain in the case is the lawful husband. The lover, Caponsacchi, under different conditions demanding that he shall not give the slightest expression to his love, rises to a reverential height which even some of Browning's readers seem to doubt as possible. Caponsacchi is, however, too much under the spell of Catholic theology to see the mystical meaning of the love which he acknowledges in his own soul for Pompilia. In this poem it is Pompilia who is given the divine vision. If I may resay what I have said in another connection,* there is no moral struggle in Pompilia's short life such as that in Caponsacchi's. Both were alike in the fact that up to a certain point in their lives their full consciousness was unawakened: hers slept, through innocence and ignorance; his, in spite of knowledge, through lack of aspiration. She was rudely awakened by suffering; he by the sudden revelation of a possible ideal. Therefore, while for him, conscious of his past failures, a struggle

*See Introduction to "Ring and Book" — Camberwell Browning.

begins: for her, conscious of no failure in her duty, which she had always followed according to her light, there simply continues duty according to the new light. Neither archbishop nor friendly "smiles and shakes of head" could weaken her conviction that, being estranged in soul from her husband, her attitude toward him was inevitable. No qualms of conscience troubled her as to her inalienable right to fly from him. That she submitted as long as she did was only because no one could be found to aid her. And how quick and certain her defence of Caponsacchi, threatened by Guido, when he overtakes them at the Inn! As she thinks over it calmly afterward, she makes no apology, but justifies her action as the voice of God.

> "If I sinned so — never obey voice more.
> O, the Just and Terrible, who bids us 'Bear.'
> Not — 'Stand by; bear to see my angels bear!'"

The gossip over her flight with Caponsacchi does not trouble her as it does him. He saved her in her great need; the supposition that their motives for flight had any taint of impurity in them is too puerile to be given a thought, yet with the same sublime certainty of the right, characteristic of her, she acknowledges, at the end, her love for Capon-

sacchi, and looks for its fulfilment in the future when marriage shall be an interpenetration of souls that know themselves into one. Having attained so great a good she can wish none of the evil she has suffered undone. She goes a step farther. Not only does she accept her own suffering for the sake of the final supreme good to herself, but she feels assured that good will fall at last to those who worked the evil.

In her absolute certainty of her realization of an unexpressed love in a future existence, she is only equaled in Browning's poetry by the speaker in "Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead."

That Browning's belief in the mystical quality of personal love never changed is shown by the fact that near the end of his life, in the "Parleying" with Daniel Bartoli, he treats a love romance based upon fact in a way to emphasize this same truth which so constantly appears in his earlier work. The lady in this case, who is of the people, having been offered a bribe by the King which will mean the dishonoring of herself and her husband, and which if she does not accept will mean her complete separation from her husband, instantly decides against the bribe. She prefers love in spirit in a convent to the

accepting of the King's promise that she will be made much of in court if she will sign a paper agreeing that her husband shall at once cede his dukedoms to the King. She explains her attitude to the Duke, who hesitates in his decision, whereupon she leaves and saves his honor for him, but his inability to decide at once upon the higher ground of spiritual love reveals to her the inadequacy of his love as compared with her own and kills her love for him. She later, however, marries a man who was only a boy of ten at the time of this episode, and their life together was a dream of happiness. But she dies and the devoted husband becomes a man of the world again. The Duke, however, has a streak of genuineness in his nature after all. Although carried away by the charms of a bold, black-eyed, tall creature, a development in keeping with the nature of the Duke in the true story, Browning is equal to the occasion, and makes him declare that the real man in him is dead and is still faithful to the old love. All she has is his ghost. Some day his soul will again be called into life by his ideal love.

The poet frequently expresses a doubt of man's power to be faithful to the letter in case of a wife's death. "Any wife to any

husband" reveals that feeling as it comes to a woman. The poet's answer to this doubt is invariably, that where the love was true other attraction is a makeshift by which a desolate life is made tolerable, or, as in "Fifine at the Fair," an ephemeral indulgence in pleasure which does not touch the reality of the spiritual love.

Browning was well aware that the ordinary woman had a stronger sense of the eternal in love than the ordinary man. In relation to the Duke in the poem previously mentioned he remarks:

> "One leans to like the duke, too; up we'll patch
> Some sort of saintship for him — not to match
> Hers — but man's best and woman's worst amount
> So nearly to the same thing, that we count
> In man a miracle of faithfulness
> If, while unfaithful somewhat, he lay stress
> On the main fact that love, when love indeed,
> Is wholly solely love from first to last —
> Truth — all the rest a lie."

It may be said that all this is the romantic love about which the poets have always sung, and has as much existence in real life as the ideal of disinterested helpfulness to love-lorn damsels sung about in the days of chivalry. True, others have sung of the exaltation and the immortality of love, and

few have been those who have found it, but nowhere has the distinctively human side been touched with such reverence as in Browning. It is not Beatrice translated into a divine personage to be adored by a worshipping devotee, but a wholly human woman who loves and is loved, who touches divinity in Browning's mind. Human love is then not an impossible ideal of which he writes in poetic language existing only in the realm of fancy; it is a living religion, bringing those who love nearer to God through the exaltation of their feeling than any other revelation of the human soul. Other states of consciousness reveal to humanity the existence of the absolute, but this gives a premonition of what divine love may have in store for the aspiring soul.

In holding to such an ideal of love as this Browning has ranged himself entirely apart from the main tendencies of thought of the century, on the relations of men and women, which have, on the one hand, been wholly conventional, marriage being a contract under the law binding for life except in cases of definite breaches of conduct, and under the Church of affection which is binding only for life; and have, on the other hand, gone extreme lengths in the advocacy of entire freedom in

the relations of the sexes. The first degrades love by making it too much a matter of law, the second by making it an ephemeral passion from which almost everything truly beautiful in the relationship of two human beings is, of necessity, eliminated.

To either of these extreme factions Browning's attitude is equally incomprehensible. The first cries out against his liberalness, the second, declaring that human emotion should be untrammeled by either Church, law or God, would find him a pernicious influence against freedom; there are, however, many shades of opinion between the two extremes which would feel sympathy with his ideals in one or more directions.

The chief difficulty in the acceptance of the ideal for most people is that they have not yet developed to the plane where feeling comes to them with the intensity, the concentration, the depth or the constancy that brings with it the sense of revelation. For many people law or the Church is absolutely necessary to preserve such feeling as they are capable of from dissipating itself in shallow sentimentalism; while one or the other will always be necessary in some form because love has its social as well as its personal aspect.

Yet the law and the Church should both allow sufficient freedom for the breaking of relations from which all sincerity has departed, even though humanity as a whole has not yet and probably will not for many ages arrive at Browning's conception of human love.

Truth to one's own highest vision in love being a cardinal principle with Browning, it follows that truth to one's nature in any direction is desirable. He even carries this doctrine of truth to the individual nature so far as to base upon it an apology for the most unmitigated villain he has portrayed, Guido, and to put this apology into the mouth of the person he had most deeply wronged, Pompilia. With exquisite vision she, even, can say:

"But where will God be absent! In his face
Is light, but in his shadow healing too:
Let Guido touch the shadow and be healed!
And as my presence was unfortunate, —
My earthly good, temptation and a snare, —
Nothing about me but drew somehow down
His hate upon me, — somewhat so excused
Therefore, since hate was thus the truth of him, —
May my evanishment for evermore
Help further to relieve the heart that cast
Such object of its natural loathing forth!
So he was made; he nowise made himself:
I could not love him, but his mother did."

It is this notion that every nature must express its own truth which underlies a poem like "Fifine at the Fair." Through expressing the truth of itself, and so grasping at half truths, even at the false, it finally reaches a higher truth. A nature like Guido's was not born with a faculty for development. He simply had to live out his own hate. The man in "Fifine" had the power of perceiving an ideal, but not the power of living up to it without experimentation upon lower planes of living, probably the most common type of man to-day. There are others like Norbert or Mertoun, in whom the ideal truth is the real truth of their natures and for whom life means the constant expansion of this ideal truth within them. In many of the varying types of men and women portrayed by Browning there is the recognition of the possibility of psychic development either by means of experience or by sudden intuitions, and if, as in the case of Guido, there is no development in this life, there is hope in a future existence in a universe ruled by a God of love.

In his views upon human character and its possibilities of development Browning is, of course, in touch with the scientific views on the subject which filled the air in all later nineteenth-century thought, changing the or-

thodox ideal of a static humanity born in sin and only to be saved by belief in certain dogmas to that of a humanity born to develop; changing the notion that sin was a terrible and absolutely defined entity, against which every soul had ceaselessly to war, into the notion that sin is a relative evil, consequent upon lack of development, which, as the human soul advances on its path, led by its inborn consciousness of the divine to be attained, will gradually disappear

But the evil which results from this lack of development in individuals to other individuals, and to society at large, brings a problem which as we have already seen in the first chapter is not so easy of solution. Yet Browning solves it, for is it not through the combat with this evil that the soul is given its real opportunity for development? Pain and suffering give rise to the thirst for happiness and joy, and through the arousing of sympathy and pity, the desire that others shall have happiness and joy, therefore to be despairing and pessimistic about evil or to wish for its immediate annihilation would really be suicidal to the best interests of the human race; nay, he even goes farther than this, as is hinted in one of his last poems, "Rephan," and imagines that any other state than one of

flux between good and evil would be monotonous:

"Startle me up, by an Infinite
Discovered above and below me — height
And depth alike to attract my flight,

"Repel my descent: by hate taught love.
Oh, gain were indeed to see above
Supremacy ever — to move, remove,

"Not reach — aspire yet never attain
To the object aimed at! Scarce in vain, —
As each stage I left nor touched again.

"To suffer, did pangs bring the loved one bliss,
Wring knowledge from ignorance: — just for this —
To add one drop to a love — abyss!

"Enough: for you doubt, you hope, O men,
You fear, you agonize, die: what then?
Is an end to your life's work out of ken?

"Have you no assurance that, earth at end,
Wrong will prove right? Who made shall mend
In the higher sphere to which yearnings tend?"

In his attitude toward the existence of evil Browning takes issue with Carlyle, as already noted in the second chapter. Carlyle, as Browning represents him, cannot reconcile the existence of evil with beneficent and omniscient power. He makes the opponent, who is an echo of Carlyle in the argument in "Bernard de Mandeville," exclaim:

"Where's
Knowledge, where power and will in evidence
'Tis Man's-play merely! Craft foils rectitude,
Malignity defeats beneficence,
And grant, at very last of all, the feud
'Twixt good and evil ends, strange thoughts intrude
Though good be garnered safely and good's foe
Bundled for burning. Thoughts steal even so —
Why grant tares leave to thus o'ertop, o'ertower
Their field-mate, boast the stalk and flaunt the flower,
Triumph one sunny minute?"

No attempt must be made to show God's reason for allowing evil. Any such attempt will fail. This passage comes as near as any in Browning to a plunge into the larger social questions which during the nineteenth century have come more and more to the front, and is an index of just where the poet stood in relation to the social movements of the century's end. His gaze was so centered upon the individual and the power of the individual to work out his own salvation and the need of evil in the process that his philosophical attitude toward evil quite overtops the militant interest in overcoming it.

Carlyle, on the other hand, saw the immense evil of the social conditions in England, and raged and stormed against them, but could see no light by which evil could be turned into good. He little realized that his own

storming at the ineptitude, the imbecility, the fool-ness of society, and his own despair over the, to him, unaccountable evils of existence, were in themselves a positive good growing out of the evil. Though he was not to suggest practical means for leading the masses out of bondage, he was to call attention in trumpet tones to the fact that the bondage existed. By so doing he was taking a first step or rather drawing aside the curtain and revealing the dire necessity that steps should be taken and taken soon. While Carlyle was militantly shouting against evil to some purpose which would later mean militant action against it, Browning was settling in his own mind just what relation evil should hold to good in the scheme of the universe, and writing a poem to tell why he was a liberal. In fine, Carlyle was opening the way toward the socialism of the latter part of the century, while Browning was still found in the camp of what the socialist of today calls the middle-class individualist.

Liberalism, which had taken on social conditions to the point through legislation where every man was free to be a property holder if he could manage to become one, and to amass wealth, left out of consideration the fact that he never could be free as long as he



William Morris

had to compete with every other man in the state to get these things. Hence the movement of the working classes to gain freedom by substituting for a competitive form of society a coöperative form. Great names in literature and art have helped toward the oncoming of this movement. Carlyle had railed at the millions of the English nation, "mostly fools;" Ruskin had bemoaned the enthronement of ugliness as the result of the industrial conditions; Matthew Arnold had proposed a panacea for the ills of the social condition in the bringing about of social equality through culture, and, best of all, William Morris had not only talked but acted.

To any student of social movements to-day, whether he has been drawn into the swirl of socialistic propaganda or whether he is still comfortably sitting in his parlor feeling an intellectual sympathy but no emotional call to leave his parlor and be up and doing, Morris appears as the most interesting figure of the century. The pioneers in the nineteenth-century movement toward socialism in England, unless we except the social enthusiasm of a Shelley or a Blake, were Owen and Maurice. Owen was that remarkable anomaly, a self-made man who had gained his wealth because of the new industrial order inaugurated by the invention

of machinery, who yet could look at the circumstances so fortuitous for him in an impersonal manner, and realize that what had put a silver spoon into his own mouth was taking away even pewter spoons from other men's mouths. Although he was really in love with the new order of machine production, he realized what many to-day fail to see, that machine production organized for the benefit of private persons would most assuredly mean the poverty and the degradation of the workers. He did not stop here, however, but spent his vast fortune in trying to make the conditions of the workingmen better. In the estimation of socialists to-day his work was of a very high order, "not mere utopianism." It bore no similarity to the romantic dreams of poets who saw visions of a perfect society regardless of the fact that a perfect society cannot suddenly blossom from conditions of appalling misery and degradation. Owen was a practical business man. He knew all the ins and outs of the industrial régime, and consequently he had a practical program, not a dream, which he wished to see carried out. Accounts of the conditions of the workers at that time are heartrending. Everywhere the same tale of abject poverty, ignorance, and oppression in field and factory,

long hours of labor and dear food. To bring help to these downtrodden people was the burning desire of Robert Owen and his followers. His efforts were not rewarded by that success which they deserved, his failure being a necessary concomitant of the fact that even a practical program for betterment cannot suddenly take effect owing to the inevitable inertia of any long-established conditions. In showing the causes which kept him from the full accomplishment of his ideals, in spite of his genuine practicalness, Brougham Villiers, the recent historian of the socialist movement in England, says he attempted too much "to influence the workers from without, trying, of course vainly, to induce the governing classes to interest themselves in the work of social reform. Yet it is difficult to see what else he could have done at the time. We have already shown how utterly disorganized the working classes were, how incapable, indeed, of any organization. They were also destitute of political power, and miserably underpaid. What could they do to help themselves? Help, if it was to come at all, must come from the only people who then had the power, if they only had the will, to accord it, and to them, at first, Robert Owen appealed. Later, he turned to

the people, and for them indeed his work was not utterly wasted, though generations were to pass before the full effect of it could be seen."

However abortive his attempts to gain political sympathy for his socialist program, and in spite of the fact that socialist agitation came to a standstill in England with the defeat of the somewhat chaotic socialism of the Chartists, it cannot be doubted that his efforts influenced the political reformers who were to take up one injustice after another and fight for its melioration until the working classes were at least brought to a plane where they could begin to organize and develop toward the still higher plane where they could themselves take their own salvation in hand.

Another man who did much to bring the workingman's cause into prominence was Maurice, who emphasized the Christian aspect of the movement. He was an excellent supplement to Owen, whose liberal views on religion militated in some quarters against an acceptance of his humane views in regard to workingmen.

Notwithstanding the personal strength of these two men they failed not only in the practical attainment of their object, but their

ideas on socialism did not even wedge itself into the thought consciousness of the Englishmen.

The men who did more than any one else to awaken the sleeping English consciousness were Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold and Morris. Of these Morris held a position midway between the old-fashioned dreamer of dreams and the new-fashioned hustling political socialist, who now sends his representatives to Parliament and has his "say" in the national affairs of the country.

Being a poet, he could, of course, dream dreams, and one of these, "The Dream of John Ball," puts the case of the toilers in a form at once so convincing and so full of divine pity that it does not seem possible it could be read even by the most hardened of trust magnates without making him see how unjust has been the distribution of this world's goods through the making of one man do the work of many: "In days to come one man shall do the work of a hundred men — yea, of a thousand or more: and this is the shift of mastership that shall make many masters and many rich men." This is a riddle which John Ball cannot grasp at once, and when it is explained to him he is still more mystified at the result.

"Thou hast seen the weaver at his loom:

think how it should be if he sit no longer before the web and cast the shuttle and draw home the sley, but if the shed open of itself, speed through it as swift as the eye can follow, and the sley come home of itself, and the weaver standing by . . . looking to half a dozen looms and bidding them what to do. And as with the weaver so with the potter, and the smith, and every worker in metals, and all other crafts, that it shall be for them looking on and tending, as with the man that sitteth in the cart while the horse draws. Yea, at last so shall it be even with those who are mere husbandmen; and no longer shall the reaper fare afield in the morning with his hook over his shoulder, and smite and bind and smite again till the sun is down and the moon is up; but he shall draw a thing made by men into the field with one or two horses, and shall say the word and the horses shall go up and down, and the thing shall reap and gather and bind, and do the work of many men. Imagine all this in thy mind if thou canst, at least as ye may imagine a tale of enchantment told by a minstrel, and then tell me what shouldst thou deem that the life of men would be amidst all this, men such as these of the township here, or the men of the Canterbury guilds."

And John Ball's conclusion is that things in that day to come will be not as they are but as they ought to be. With irresistible logic he declares:

"I say that if men still abide men as I have known them, and unless these folk of England change as the land changeth — and forsooth of the men, for good and for evil, I can think no other than I think now, or behold them other than I have known them and loved them — I say if the men be still men, what will happen except that there should be all plenty in the land, and not one poor man therein . . . for there would then be such abundance of good things, that, as greedy as the lords might be, there would be enough to satisfy their greed and yet leave good living for all who labored with their hands; so that these should labor for less than now, and they would have time to learn knowledge," and he goes on, "take part in the making of laws."

But Morris was not the man to dream, merely. Though he did not trouble himself about the doctrinaire side of socialism, he preached it constantly from the human side and from the artistic side. While some socialist writers make us feel that socialism might possibly only be Gradgrind in another guise, he makes us feel that peace and plenty

and loveliness would attend upon the sons and daughters of socialism. As one of his many admirers says of him: "He was an out-and-out Communist because of the essential sanity of a mind incapable of the desire to monopolize anything he could not use."

The authoritarianism of the Marxian socialists was distasteful to him, for, to quote from the same admirer, his "conception of socialism was that of a free society, based on the simple rights of all to use the earth and anything in it, and the consequent abolition of all competition for the means of life." His attitude of mind on these points led him to break away from the Social Democratic Federation, which, with its political program, was distasteful to Morris's more purely social feeling, and found the Socialist League. This emphasized more particularly the artistic side of socialism. Morris and his followers were bent upon making life a beautiful thing as well as a comfortable thing.

According to all accounts, the League was not as great a force in the development of socialist ideals as was Morris himself, who inspired such men as Burne-Jones and Walter Crane with a sympathy in the new ideals, as well as multitudes of lesser men in the crowds that gathered to listen to him in Waltham

Green or in some other like open place of a Sunday.

Morris's chief contribution to the growth of the cause was perhaps his own business plant, into which he put as many of his ideals for the betterment of the workingmen's conditions as he was able to do under existing conditions. Who has not gloated over his exquisite editions of Chaucer and the like — books in which even the punctuation marks are a delight to the eye, and the illustrations as far beyond ordinary illustrations as the punctuation marks are beyond ordinary periods. If anything could add to the richness of the interior it is the contrasting simplicity of the white vellum bindings, and, again, if there is another possible touch of grace — a gilding of the lily — what could better fulfil that purpose than the outer boxing covered with a Morris cotton print! The critical may object that these Morris editions are so expensive that none but millionaire bibliophiles can have many of them. How many of us have even seen them except in such collections! And how many of his workmen are able to share in this product of their labor to any greater extent than the product of labor is usually shared in by its producers, may be asked.

Though we are obliged to answer that the workmen probably do not have the Morris books in their own libraries, they yet have the joy of making these beautiful books under conditions of happy workmanship — that is, they are skilled craftsmen, who have been trained in an apprenticeship, who are asked to work only eight hours a day, who receive higher wages than other workmen and, above all, who have the stimulation of the presence of Morris, himself, working among them.

Morris's enthusiasm for a more universally happy and beautiful society combined with the object lesson of his own methods in conducting a business upon genuinely artistic principles has done an incalculable amount in spreading the gospel of socialism. Still there was too much of the *laissez faire* atmosphere about his attitude for it to bring about any marked degree of progress.

The opinion of Mr. William Clarke who had many conversations with Morris on the subject reveals that, after all, there was too much of the poet about him for him to be a really practical force in the movement. He writes:

"It is not easy to understand how Morris proposes to bring about the condition of things

he looks forward to. No parliamentary or municipal methods, no reliance upon law-making machinery, an abhorrence of everything that smacks of 'politics': it all seems very impracticable to the average man, and certainly suggests the poet rather than the man of affairs. What Morris thinks will really happen is, I should say, judging from numerous conversations I have had with him, something like this: Existing society is, he thinks, gradually, but with increasing momentum, disintegrating through its own rottenness. The capitalist system of production is breaking down fast and is compelled to exploit new regions in Africa and other parts, where he thinks its term will be short. Economically, socially, morally, politically, religiously, civilization is becoming bankrupt. Meanwhile it is for the socialist to take advantage of this disintegration by spreading discontent, by preaching economic truths, and by any kind of demonstration which may harass the authorities and develop among the people an *esprit de corps*. By these means the people will, in some way or other, be ready to take up the industry of the world when the capitalist class is no longer able to direct or control it. Morris believes less in a violent revolution than he did and thinks that work-

men's associations and labor unions form a kind of means between brute force on the one hand and a parliamentary policy on the other. He does not, however, share the sanguine views of John Burns as to the wonders to be accomplished by the 'new' trades unionism."

The practical ineffectiveness of the Morris socialism in spite of its having taken some steps in the direction of vital activity was overcome by the next socialist body which came into prominence — the Fabian Society, in which Bernard Shaw has been so conspicuous a figure.

As already mentioned, the Fabians are not a fighting body, but a solidly educational body. To them is due the bringing of socialism into the realm of political economy, and in so doing they have striven to harmonize it with English practical political methods. Besides this, they have done a vast amount of work in educating public opinion, not with the view to immediately converting the English nation to a belief in the changing of the present order into one wholly socialistic, but with a view to introducing socialistic treatment of the individual problems which arise in contemporary politics.

Their campaign of education was conducted so well that its effects were soon visible, not



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only in the modification of public opinion, but upon the workingmen themselves. The method was simple enough: "If any public, especially any social, question came to the front, the Fabian method was to make a careful independent study of the matter, and present to the public, in a penny pamphlet, a thoughtful statement of the case and some common sense, and incidentally socialistic, suggestions for a solution." Fabian ideas were thus introduced into the consciousness of the awakening trades unionists.

It has been objected that the gain was much more for the trades unionists than for the Fabians. Their one-time eager pupils have, it is said, progressed beyond their masters, as a review of recent socialistic tendencies would divulge had we the time to follow them in this place. However that may be, the great fact remains that the Fabians have done more than any other branch of socialists to bridge over the distance between what the English writers call the middle-class idealist and the proletarian, with the result that the proletarian has begun to think for himself and to translate middle-class idealism into proletarian realism.

Socialism, from being the watch word of the enthusiastic revolutionary, began to be dis-

cussed in every intelligent household and in every debating society. This enormous growth in public sentiment occurred during the session of the Unionist Parliament, 1886–92. When this Parliament opened there was hardly any socialist literature, and when it closed everybody was reading Bellamy and the "Fabian Essays," and Sir William Harcourt had made his memorable remark: "We are all socialists now."

The gesticulating and bemoaning idealists, the Carlyles and the Ruskins, the revolutionary but *laissez faire* prophets like Morris, who believed in a complete change but not in using any of the means at hand to bring about that change, had given place to men like Keir Hardie and John Burns, who had sprung into leadership from the ranks of the workingmen themselves, and who were to be later their representatives in Parliament when the Independent Labor Party came into existence. All this had been done by that group of progressive men, long-headed enough to see that the ideal of a better and more beautiful social life could not be gained except by a long and toilsome process of education and of action which would consciously follow the principles of growth discovered by scientists to obtain in all unconscious cosmic and

physical development, the very principle which as we have seen, Browning declared should have guided his hero Sordello long before the Fabian socialists came into existence — namely, the principle of evolution. That their methods should have peacefully brought about the conditions where it was possible to form an Independent Labor Party, which would have the power to speak and act for itself instead of working as the Fabians themselves do through the parties already in power, shouts aloud for the wisdom of their policy. And is there not still plenty of work for them to do in the still further educating of all parties toward the flowering of genuine democracy, when the dreams of the dreamer shall have become actualities, because true and not spurious ways of making them actual shall have been worked out by experience?

This remarkable growth in social ideals was taking place during the ninth decade of the century and the last decade of Browning's life. Is there any indication in his later work that he was conscious of it? There is certainly no direct evidence in his work that he progressed any farther in the development of democratic ideals than we find in the liberalism of such a parliamentary leader as Mr. Gladstone, while in that poem in which he

considers more especially than in any other the subject of better conditions for the people, "Sordello," he distinctly expresses a mood of doubt as to the advisability of making conditions too easy for the human being, who needs the hardships and ills of life to bring his soul to perfection, a far more important thing in Browning's eyes than to live comfortably and beautifully. All he wishes for the human being is the fine chance to make the most of himself spiritually. The socialist would say that he could not secure the chance to do this except in a society where the murderous principle of competition should give way to that of coöperation. With this Browning might agree. Indeed, may this not have been the very principle Sordello had in mind as something revealed to him which neither Guelf nor Ghibelline could see, or was this only the more obvious principle of republican as opposed to monarchical principle and still falling under an individualistic conception of society?

While his work is instinct with sympathy for all classes and conditions of men, Browning does not feel the ills of life with the intensity of a Carlyle, nor its ugliness with the grief of a Ruskin, nor yet its lack of culture with the priggishness of an Arnold, nor would he

stand in open spaces and preach discontent to the masses like Morris. Why? Because he from the first was made wise to see a good in evil, a hope in ill-success, to be proud of men's fallacies, their half reasons, their faint aspirings, upward tending all though weak, the lesson learned after weary experiences of life by Paracelsus. His thought was centered upon the worth of every human being to himself and for God. Earth is after all only a place to grow in and prepare one's self for lives to come, and failure here, so long as the fight has been bravely fought, is to be regarded with anything but regret, for it is through the failure that the vision of the future is made more sure.

What he finds true, as we saw, in the religious or philosophical world, he finds true in the moral world. Lack in human knowledge points the way to God; lack in human success points the way to immortality.

The meaning of this life in relation to a future life being so much more important than this life in itself, and man's individual development being so much more important than his social development, Browning naturally would not turn his attention upon those practical, social or governmental means by which even the chance for individual development must

be secured. He is too much occupied with the larger questions. He is not even a middle-class idealist, dreaming dreams of future earthly bliss; he is the prophet of future existences.

Does his practical influence upon the social development of the century amount to nothing then? Not at all. He started out on his voyage through the century toward the democratic ideal in the good ship Individualism — the banner ship indeed. What he has emphasized upon this voyage is first the paramount worth of each and every human being, whether good or bad. Second, the possibility in every human being of conceiving an ideal, toward which by the exertion of his will power he should aspire, battling steadfastly against every obstruction that life throws in his course. Third, that even those who are incapable of formulating an ideal must be regarded as living out the truth of their natures and must therefore be treated with compassion. Fourth, that the highest function of the human soul is love, which expresses itself in many ways, but attains its full flowering only in the love of man and woman on a plane of spiritual exaltation, and that through this power of human love some glimpse of the divine is caught; therefore to

this function of the soul it is of the utmost importance that human beings should be loyal and true, even if that loyalty and truth conflict with conventional ways of looking at life. Sailing in this good ship he also expresses his sympathy indirectly in his dramas and directly upon several occasions with the ideals of political freedom which during the century have been making progress toward democracy in the English Parliament through the legislation of the liberals, whose laws have brought a greater and greater measure of freedom to the middle classes and some measure of freedom to the working classes.

But it seems as if when nearing the end of the century Browning landed from his ship upon some high island and straining his eyes toward the horizon of the dawn of another life did not fully realize that there was another good ship, Socialism, struggling to reach the ideal of democracy, and now become the banner ship whose work is to sail out into the unknown, turbulent seas of the future, finding the path to another high island in order that the way may be made clear for the ship Individualism to continue her course to another stage in the voyage toward a perfect democracy. And as the new ship, Socialism, passes on its way it will do well to heed the

vision of the poet seer, straining his eyes toward the dawn of other lives in other spheres, lest in the struggle and strain to bring about a more comfortable and beautiful life upon earth, the important truth be slighted that humanity has a higher destiny to fulfil than can be realized in the most utopian dreams of an earthly democracy. This truth is in fact not only forgotten but is absolutely denied by many of the latter-day social reformers.

To sum up, I think one is justified in concluding that as a sympathizer with the liberal political tendencies of the nineteenth century Browning is of his age. In his quiescence upon the proletarian movement of the latter part of the nineteenth century he seems to have been left behind by his age. In his insistence upon the worth of the individual to himself and to God he is both of his age and beyond it. As has been said of philosophy, "It cannot give us bread but it can give us God, soul and immortality," so we may say of Browning, that though he did not raise up his voice in the cry of the proletarian for bread, he has insisted upon the truths of God, the soul and immortality.

ART SHIBBOLETHS

IN THE foregoing chapters the relations of the poet to the philosophical, religious, political, and social movements of the nineteenth century have been pointed out. In this and the next chapter some account of his relation to the artistic and literary ideals of the century will be attempted.

Browning's relation to the art of the century is, of course, twofold, dealing as it must with his own conceptions and criticisms of art as well as with the position of his own art in the poetic development of the century.

In order to understand more fully his own contribution to the developing literary standards of the century it may be well first to consider the fundamental principles of art laid down by him in various poems wherein he has deliberately dealt with the subject.

The poem in which he has most clearly formulated the general principles underlying the growth of art is the "Parleying" with Charles Avison. Though music is the special

art under consideration, the rules of growth obtaining in that are equally applicable to other arts. They are found to be, as we should expect in Browning, a combination of the ideas of evolution and conservation. Though the standards of art change and develop, because as man's soul evolves, more complex forms are needed to express his deeper experiences, his wider vision, yet in each stage of the development there is an element of permanent beauty which by the aid of the historical sense man may continue to enjoy. That element of permanence exists when genuine feeling and aspiration find expression in forms of art. The element of change grows out of the fact that both the thought expressed and the form in which it is expressed are partial manifestations of the beauty or truth toward which feeling aspires; hence the need of fresh attempts to reach the infinite. The permanence of feeling, expressing itself in ever new forms, is brought out finely in this passage:

"Truths escape
Time's insufficient garniture: they fade,
They fall — those sheathings now grown sere, whose aid
Was infinite to truth they wrapped, saved fine
And free through march frost: May dews crystalline
Nourish truth merely, — does June boast the fruit
As — not new vesture merely but, to boot,

Novel creation? Soon shall fade and fall
Myth after myth — the husk-like lies I call
New truth's Corolla-safeguard."

In another passage is shown how the permanence of feeling conserves even the form, if we will bring ourselves into touch with it:

"Never dream
That what once lived shall ever die! They seem
Dead — do they? lapsed things lost in limbo? Bring
Our life to kindle theirs, and straight each king
Starts, you shall see, stands up."

This kindling of an old form with our own life is more difficult in the case of music than it is in painting or poetry, for in these we have a concrete form to deal with—a form which reflects the thought with much more definiteness than music is able to do. The strength and weakness, at once, of music is that it gives expression to subtler regions of thought and feeling than the other arts, at the same time that the form is more evanescent, because fashioned out of elements infinitely less related to nature than those of other art forms. In his poems on music, the poet always emphasizes these aspects of music. Its supremacy as a means of giving expression to the subtlest regions of feeling is dwelt upon

in "Abt Vogler" and "Fifine at the Fair." The Abbé, from the standpoint of the creator of music, feels so strongly from the inside its power for expressing infinite aspiration that in his ecstasy he exclaims: "The rest may reason and welcome. 'Tis we musicians know." Upon the evanescence of the form peculiar emphasis is also laid in this poem, through the fact that the music is improvised. Yet even this fact does not mean the entire annihilation of the form. In the tenth stanza of the poem the idea of the permanence of the art form as well as of the feeling is expanded into a symbol of the immortality of all good:

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity confirms the conception of an hour,
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

The sophistical arguer in "Fifine" feels this same power of music to express thoughts not to be made palpable in any other manner.

"Words struggle with the weight
So feebly of the False, thick element between
Our soul, the True, and Truth! which, but that intervene
False shows of things, were reached as easily by thought
Reducible to word, and now by yearnings wrought
Up with thy fine free force, oh Music, that canst thrill,
Electrically win a passage through the lid
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,
Hardly transpierce as thou."

And again, in another passage, he gives to music the power of conserving a mood of feeling, which in this case is not an exalted one, since it is one that chimes in with his own rather questionable feeling for Fifine, the fiz-gig. It is found in Schumann's "Carnival":

"Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music, — mine, o'er-burthened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burthen to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead
Of words, sought sounds, and saved forever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose, — nay, puts poetry to shame.
I read the note, I strike the Key, I bid *record*
The instrument — thanks greet the veritable word!
And not in vain I urge: 'O dead and gone away,
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength becomes my stay,
Thy record serve as well to register — I felt
And knew thus much of truth! With me, must knowledge
melt
Into surmise and doubt and disbelief unless
Thy music reassure — I gave no idle guess,

But gained a certitude I yet may hardly keep!
What care? since round is piled a monumental heap
Of music that conserves the assurance, thou as well
Was certain of the same! thou, master of the spell,
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men
Feel only to forget!"

The man in the case is merely an appreciator, not a creator, yet he experiences with equal force music's power as a recorder of feeling. He notes also that the feeling must appear from time to time in a new dress,

"the stuff that's made
To furnish man with thought and feeling is purveyed
Substantially the same from age to age, with change
Of the outside only for successive feasters."

In this case, the old tunes have actually been worked over by the more modern composer whose form has not yet sufficiently gone by to fail of an immediate appeal to this person with feelings kindled by similar experiences. What the speaker in the poem perceives is not merely the fact of the feelings experienced but the power of the music to take him off upon a long train of more or less philosophical reasoning born of that very element of change. In this power of suggestiveness lies music's greater range of spiritual force even when the feeling expressed is not of the deepest.

If we look at his poems on painting, the same principles of art are insisted upon except that more emphasis is laid upon the positive value of the incompleteness of the form. In so far as painting or sculpture reaches a perfect unity of thought and form it loses its power of suggesting an infinite beauty beyond any that our earth-born race may express.

This in Browning's opinion is the limitation of Greek art. It touches perfection or completion in expression and in so doing limits its range to the brief passion of a day. The effect of such art is to arouse a sort of despair, for it so far transcends merely human beauty that there seems nothing left to accomplish:

"So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
You learned — to submit is a mortal's duty."

When such a deadlock as this is reached through the stultifying effect of an art expression which seems to have embodied all there is of passion and physical beauty, the one way out is to turn away from the abject contemplation of such art and go back again to humanity itself, in whose widening nature may be discovered the promise of an eternity of progression. Therefore, "To cries of Greek

art and what more wish you?" the poet would have it that the early painters replied:

> "To become now self-acquainters,
> And paint man, whatever the issue!
> Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
> New fears aggandize the rags and tatters:
> To bring the invisible full into play!
> Let the visible go to the dogs — what matters?"

The revolution in art started by these early worthies had more of spiritual promise in it than the past perfection—"The first of the new, in our race's story, beats the last of the old."

His emphasis here upon the return to humanity in order to gain a new source of inspiration in art is further illustrated in his attitude toward the two painters which he portrays so splendidly: Fra Lippo Lippi, the realist, whose Madonnas looked like real women, and who has scandalized some critics on this account, and Andrea del Sarto, the faultless painter, who exclaims in despair as he gazes upon a picture by Raphael, in which he sees a fault to pardon in the drawing's line, an error that he could alter for the better, "But all the play, the insight and the stretch," beyond him.

The importance of basing art upon the study

of the human body is later insisted upon in Francis Furini, not as an end in itself, but as the dwelling place of the soul. "Let my pictures prove I know," says Furini,

> "Somewhat of what this fleshly frame of ours
> Or is or should be, how the soul empowers
> The body to reveal its every mood
> Of love and hate, pour forth its plenitude
> Of passion."

The evolutionary ideal appears again in his utterances upon poetry, though when speaking of poetry it is the value of the subject matter and its intimate relation to the form upon which he dwells.

The little poem "Popularity" shows as clearly as any the importance which he attaches to a new departure in poetic expression, besides giving vent to his scorn of the multitude which sees nothing in the work of the innovator but which is ready at a later date to laud his imitators. Any minor poet, for that matter, any Nokes or Stokes who merely prints blue according to the poetic conventions of the past, possessing not a suspicion of the true inspiration which goes to the making of a poet of the new order, is more acceptable to an unseeing public than him with power to fish "the murex up" that contains the precious drop of royal blue.

More than one significant hint may be gleaned from his verse in regard to his opinion upon the formal side of the poet's art. In "Transcendentalism" he has his fling at the didactic poet who pleases to speak naked thoughts instead of draping them in sights and sounds, for "song" is the art of the poet. Some stout mage like him of Halberstadt has his admiration, who with a

> 'Look you!' vents a brace of rhymes,
> And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
> Over us, under, round us every side,
> Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
> And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all, —
> Buries us with a glory young once more,
> Pouring heaven into this shut house of life."

He was equally averse to an ornate classical embellishment of a latter day subject or to a looking at nature through mythopœic Greek eyes. This is driven home in the splendid fooling in "Gerard de Lairesse" where the poet himself indulges by way of a joke in some high-flown classical imagery in derision of the style of Lairesse and hints covertly probably at the nineteenth-century masters of classical resuscitation, in subject matter and allusion, Swinburne and Morris. Reacting to soberer mood, he reiterates his belief in the utter deadness of Greek ideals of art, speaking

with a strength of conviction so profound as to make one feel that here at least Browning suffered from a decided limitation, all the more strange, too, when one considers his own masterly treatment of Greek subjects. To the poets whose poetic creed is

> "Dream afresh old godlike shapes,
> Recapture ancient fable that escapes,
> Push back reality, repeople earth
> With vanished falseness, recognize no worth
> In fact new-born unless 'tis rendered back
> Pallid by fancy, as the western rack
> Of fading cloud bequeaths the lake some gleam
> Of its gone glory!"

he would reply,

> "Let things be — not seem,
> I counsel rather, — do, and nowise dream!
> Earth's young significance is all to learn;
> The dead Greek lore lies buried in the urn
> Where who seeks fire finds ashes. Ghost, forsooth!
> What was the best Greece babbled of as truth?
> A shade, a wretched nothing, — sad, thin, drear,
>
> . . .
>
> Sad school
> Was Hades! Gladly, — might the dead but slink
> To life back, — to the dregs once more would drink
> Each interloper, drain the humblest cup
> Fate mixes for humanity.

The rush onward to the supreme is uppermost in the poet's mind in this poem. Though he does indulge in the refrain that there shall never be one lost good echoing the thought in "Charles Avison," the climax of his mood is in the contemplation of the evolutionary force of the soul which must leave Greek art behind and find new avenues of beauty:

> "The Past indeed
> Is past, gives way before Life's best and last
> The all-including Future! What were life
> Did soul stand still therein, forego her strife
> Through the ambiguous Present to the goal
> Of some all-reconciling Future? Soul,
> Nothing has been which shall not bettered be
> Hereafter, — leave the root, by law's decree
> Whence springs the ultimate and perfect tree!
> Busy thee with unearthing root? Nay, climb —
> Quit trunk, branch, leaf and flower — reach, rest sublime
> Where fruitage ripens in the blaze of day."

When it comes to the subject matter of poetry, Browning constantly insists that it should be the study of the human soul. A definite statement as to the range of subjects under this general material of poetry is put forth very early in his poetical career in "Paracelsus" and it is all-inclusive. It is the passage where Aprile describes how universal he wished to make his sympathy as a poet.

No one is to be left out of his all-embracing democracy.

Such, then, are his general principles in regard to poetic development and subject matter. These do not touch upon the question so often discussed of the relative value of the subjective as against the objective poet. This point the poet considers in "Sordello," where he throws in his weight on the side of the objective poet. In the passage in the third book the poet, speaking in person, gives illustrations of three sorts of poetic composition: the dramatic, the descriptive and the meditative; the first belongs to the objective, the second, not distinctively to either, and the third to the subjective manner of writing. The dramatic method is the most forceful, for it imparts the gift of seeing to others, while the descriptive and meditative merely tell what they saw, or, worse still, talk about it.

Further indications of his allegiance to the dramatic form of poetry as the supreme one are found in his poems inspired by Shakespeare, "House" and "Shop," but we must turn to a pregnant bit of his prose in order to find his exact feeling upon the relations of the subjective and objective poet, together with a clear conception of what he meant by

a dramatic poet, which was something more than Shakespeare's "holding the mirror up to nature." In his view the dramatic poet must have the vision of the seer as well as the penetration of a psychologist. He must hold the mirror up not only to nature, regarded as phenomena, but to the human soul, and he must perceive the relation of that human soul to the universal. He must in fact plunge beneath the surface of actions and events and bring forth to the light the psychic and cosmic causes of these things. The passage referred to in the "Introduction to the Shelley Letters" points out how in the evolution of poetry there will be the play and interplay of the subjective and the objective faculties upon each other, with the probable result of the arising of poets who will combine the two sorts of faculty. While Browning's own sympathy with the dramatic poet is as fully evident here as in the passage in "Sordello," he realizes, as perhaps he did not at that time, when he was himself breaking away from Shelley's influence, the value of the subjective method in carrying on the process of poetic evolution:

"It would be idle to inquire, of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation, which is the higher or even rarer endowment. If the subjective might seem to be the ultimate

requirement of every age, the objective, in the strictest state, must still retain its original value. For it is with this word, as starting-point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilized, but the raw material it operates upon must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality; what it was before they saw it, in reference to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever. Nor is there any reason why these two modes of poetic faculty may not issue hereafter from the same poet in successive perfect works, examples of which, according to what are now considered the exigencies of art, we have hitherto possessed in distinct individuals only. A mere running in of the one faculty upon the other is, of course, the ordinary circumstance. Far more rarely it happens that either is found so decidedly prominent and superior as to be pronounced comparatively pure: while of the perfect shield, with the gold and the silver side set up for all comers to challenge, there has yet been no instance. A tribe of successors (Homerides), working more or less in the same spirit, dwell on his discoveries and reinforce his doctrine; till, at unawares, the world is found to be subsisting wholly on the shadow of a reality, on sentiments diluted from passions, on the tradition of a fact, the convention of a moral, the straw of last year's harvest. Then is the imperative call for the appearance of another sort of poet, who shall at once replace this intellectual rumination of food swallowed long ago, by a supply of the fresh and living swathe; getting at new substance by breaking up the assumed wholes into parts of independent and unclassed value, careless of the unknown laws for recombining them (it will be the business of yet another poet to suggest those hereafter), prodigal of objects for men's outer

and not inner sight; shaping for their uses a new and different creation from the last, which it displaces by the right of life over death, — to endure until, in the inevitable process, its very sufficiency to itself shall require, at length, an exposition of its affinity to something higher — when the positive yet conflicting facts shall again precipitate themselves under a harmonizing law, and one more degree will be apparent for a poet to climb in that mighty ladder, of which, however cloud-involved and undefined may glimmer the topmost step, the world dares no longer doubt that its gradations ascend."

If we measure Browning's own work by the poetic standards which he has himself set up in the course of that work, it is quite evident that he has on the whole lived up to them. He has shown himself to be an illustration of the evolutionary principles in which he believes by breaking away from all previous standards of taste in poetry. The history of poetry in England has shown this to be a distinctive characteristic of all the greatest English poets. From Shakespeare down they have one and all run afoul of the critics whose special province seems to be to set up literary shibboleths which every genius is bent upon disregarding. When Spenser was inventing his stanza, verse critics were abject in their worship of hexameters, and their hatred of bald rhymes. Though these sticklers for classical forms could see clearly enough that Spenser was possessed of

genius, they yet lamented the blindness of one, who might have written hexameters, perversely exclaiming "Why a God's name may not we as else the Greeks have the kingdom of our own language, and measure our accents by the sound, reserving quantity to the verse?" When Milton appears and finds blank verse the medium best suited to his subject, he comes up against the rhyming standards of his day and is forced to submit to the indignity of having his "Paradise Lost" "tagged with rhymes," as he expresses it, by Dryden, who graciously devoted his powers of rhyme to an improved version of the poem. Milton was actually obliged to defend himself in his preface to "Paradise Lost" for using blank verse, as Browning defends himself in the Epilogue to "Pacchiarotto and How We Worked in Distemper" for writing "strong" verse instead of the "sweet" verse the critics demand of him.

By the time the nineteenth century dawns the critics are safely intrenched in the editorial den, from which, shielded by any sort of shibboleth they can get hold of, they may hurl forth their projectiles upon the unoffending head of the genius, who, with no chance of firing back in the open arena of the magazine, must either suffer in silence or take refuge

in sarcastic slurs upon his critics in his poetry, for here lies the only chance of getting even without waiting for the whirligig of time to bring the public round to a recognition of the fact that he is the one who has in very truth, "fished the murex up."

The caliber of man who could speak of "The Ode to Immortality" as "a most illegible and unintelligible poem," or who wonders that any man in his senses could put his name to such a rhapsody as "Endymion," or who dismissed "Prometheus Unbound" with the remark that it was a *mélange* of nonsense, cockneyism, poverty and pedantry, would hardly be expected to welcome "Sordello" with effusion. Even very intelligent people cracked unseemly jokes upon the appearance of "Sordello," and what wonder, for Browning's British instinct for freedom carried him in this poem to the most extreme lengths. In "Pauline" he had allied himself with things familiar to the English reader of poetry. Many of the allusions are classical and introduced with a rich musicalness that Shelley himself might have envied. The reminiscences of Shelley would also come within the intellectual acreage of most of the cultured people of the time. And even in "Paracelsus," despite the unfamiliarity of the

subject, there was music and imagery such as to link the art with the admired poetic art of the day, but in "Sordello" all bounds are broken.

No one but a delver in the byways of literature could, at that time, have been expected to know anything about Sordello; no one but a historian could have been expected to know about the complicated struggles of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines; no one but a philosopher about the tendencies, both political and literary, manifesting themselves in the direction of the awakening of democratic ideals in these pre-Dantean days; no one but a psychologist about the tortuous windings of Sordello's mind.

Only by special searching into all these regions of knowledge can one to-day gain a complete grasp of the situation. He must patiently tread all the paths that Browning trod before he can enter into sympathy with the poet. Then he will crack no more jokes, but he will marvel at the mind which could wield all this knowledge with such consummate familiarity; he will grow ecstatic over the splendors of the poem, and will regret its redundancy not of diction so much but of detail and its amazing lack of organic unity.

No one but a fanatic could claim that

"Sordello" is a success as an organic work of art. While the poet had a mastery of knowledge, thought and feeling, he did not have sufficient mastery of his own form to weld these together into a harmonious and convincing whole, such mastery as he, for example, shows in "The Ring and the Book," though even in that there is some survival of the old redundancy.

One feels when considering "Sordello" as a whole as if gazing upon a picture in which the perspective and the high lights and the shadows are not well related to each other. As great an abundance of detail is expended upon the less important as upon the more important fact, and while the details may be interesting enough in themselves, they dislodge more important affairs from the center of consciousness. It is, not to be too flippant, something like Alice's game of croquet in "Through the Looking Glass." When the hedgehog ball is nicely rolled up ready to be struck, the flamingo mallet walks off somewhere else.

There, then, in "Sordello" is perhaps the most remarkable departure from the accepted in poetic art that an Englishman has ever attempted. In its elements of failure, however, it gave "a triumph's evidence," to use

the poet's own phrase, "of the fulness of the days." In this poem he had thrown down the gauntlet. His subject matter was not to be like that of any other poet, nor was his form to be like that of any other poet. He discarded the flowing music of "Pauline" and of "Paracelsus." His allusions were no longer to be classic, but to be directly related to whatever subject he had in hand; his style was also to be forth-right and related to his subject, strong, idiomatic, rugged, even jolting if need be, or noble, sweeping along in large rhythms or couched in rare forms of symbolism, but, whatever it was to be, always different from what had been.

All he required at the time when "Sordello" appeared was to find that form in which he could so unify his powers that his poems would gain the organic completeness necessary to a work of art. No matter what new regions an artist may push into he must discover the law of being of this new region. Unless he does, his art will not convince, but the moment he does, all that was not convincing falls into its right place. He becomes the master of his art, and relates the new elements in such a way that their rightness and their beauty, if not immediately recognized, are sure sooner or later to be recog-

nized by the evolving appreciator, who is the necessary complement, by the way, of the evolving artist. Before "Sordello" Browning had tried three other forms; the subjective narrative in "Pauline," the dramatic poem in "Paracelsus," a regular drama in "Strafford," which however runs partly parallel with "Sordello" in composition. He had also done two or three short dramatic monologues.

He evidently hoped that the regular drama would prove to be the form most congenial to him, for he kept on persistently in that form for nearly ten years, wrote much magnificent poetry in it and at times attained a grandeur of dramatic utterance hardly surpassed except in the master of all dramatists, Shakespeare. But while he has attained a very genuine success in this form, it is not the success of the popular acting drama. His dramas are to-day probably being left farther and farther aside every moment in the present exaggerated demands for characters in action, or perhaps it might be nearer the truth to say clothes horses in action. Besides, the drama of action in character, which is the type of drama introduced into English literature by Browning, has reached a more perfect development in other hands. Ibsen's dramas are preëminently dramas of action in char-

acter, but the action moves with such rapidity that the audience is almost cheated into thinking they are the old thing over again—that is, dramas of characters in action.

Browning's characters in his dramas are presented with a completeness of psychological analysis which makes them of paramount interest to those few who can and like to listen to people holding forth to any length on the stage, and with superb actors, who can give every subtlest change of mood, a Browning drama furnishes an opportunity for the utmost intensity of pleasure. Still, one cannot help but feel that the impressionistic psychology of Ibsen reaches a pinnacle of dramatic art not attained by Browning in his plays, delightful in character portrayal as they are, and not upon any account to have been missed from dramatic literature.

In the dramatic monologue Browning found just that form which would focus his forces, bringing them into the sort of relationship needed to reveal the true law of being for his new region of poetic art.

If we inquire just why this form was the true medium for the most perfect expression of his genius, I think we may answer that in it, as he has developed it, is given an opportunity for the legitimate exercise of his

mental subtlety. Through the voice of one speaker he can portray not only the speaker but one or more other characters, and at the same time show the scene setting, and all without any direct description. On the other hand, his tendency to redundancy, so marked when he is making a character reveal only his own personality, is held in check by the necessity of using just those words and turns of expression and dwelling upon just those details which will make each character stand out distinctly, and at the same time bring the scene before the reader.

The people in his dramatic monologues live before us by means of a psychology as impressionistic as that of Ibsen's in his plays. The effect is the same as that in a really great impressionistic painting. Nature is revealed far more distinctly — the thing of lights and shadows, space and movement — than in pictures bent upon endless details of form. "My Last Duchess" is one among many fine examples of his method in monologue. In that short poem we are made to see what manner of man is the duke, what manner of woman the duchess. We see what has been the duke's past, what is to be his future, also the present scene, as the duke stands in the hall of his palace talking to an ambassador

from the count who has come to arrange a marriage with the duke for the count's daughter. Besides all this a glimpse of the ambassador's attitude of mind is given. This is done by an absolutely telling choice of words and by an organic relationing of the different elements. The law of his genius asserts itself.

Browning's own ideal of the poet who makes others see was not completely realized until he had perfected a form which would lend itself most perfectly to the manner of thing which he desired to make others see — namely, the human soul in all its possible manifestations of feeling and mood, good, bad, and indifferent, from the uninspired organist who struggles with a mountainous fugue to the inspired improvisor whose soul ascends to God on the wings of his music, from the unknown sensitive painter who cannot bear to have his pictures the subject of criticism or commerce to the jolly life-loving Fra Lippo, from the jealous, vindictive woman of "The Laboratory" to the vision-seeing Pompilia, from Ned Bratts to Bishop Blougram, and so on — so many and wonderful that custom cannot state their infinite variety.

Consistent, so far, with his own theories we find the work of Browning to be. He also follows his ideal in the discarding of classical

allusion and illustration. Part of his dictum that the form should express the thought is shown in his habitual fitting of his allusions to the subject he is treating. By this means he produces his atmosphere and brings the scene clearly before us; witness his constant references to Molinos and his influence in "The Ring and the Book," an influence which was making itself felt in all classes of society at the time when the actual tragedy portrayed in the poem occurred. This habit, of course, brings into his poetry a far wider range of allusions unfamiliar to his contemporaries than is to be found in other Victorian poets, and makes it necessary that these should be "looked up" before an adequate enjoyment of their fitness is possible. Hence the Browning societies, so often held up to ridicule by the critics, who blindly prefer to show their superior attitude of mind in regard to everything they do not know, and growl about his obscurity, to welcoming any movement which means an increase of general culture. The Browning societies have not only done much to make Browning's unusual allusions common matters of knowledge, but they have helped to keep alive a taste for all poetry in an age when poetry has needed all the friendly support it could get.

All great poets lead the ordinary mind to unfamiliar regions of knowledge and thereby to fresh planes of enjoyment. That Browning has outdone all other poets in this particular should be to his honor, not to his dispraise.

In one very marked direction, however, he is not a perfect exemplar of his own theories — that is, he is not always consistently dramatic. He belongs to that order of poets described by himself in the Shelley Introduction as neither completely subjective nor completely objective, but with the two faculties at times running in upon each other. He is often absolutely objective in his expression of a mood or a feeling, but the moment the mood takes upon it the tinge of thought we begin to feel Browning himself.

The fundamental principles upon which he bases his own solution of the problems of existence are seen to crop out, colored, it is true, by the personality of the speaker, but yet traceable to their source in the mental make up of Browning himself. It may well be that Browning has come so near to the ultimate truth discoverable by man in his fundamental principles that they are actually universal truths, to be found lying deep down at the roots of all more partial expressions, just as gravitation, conservation of energy, evo-

lution underlie every phenomena of nature, and therefore when a Pope in "The Ring and the Book," a Prince Hohenstiel-Swangau, a Bishop Blougram, a Cleon or a John in "The Death in the Desert," give utterance to their views upon life, they are bound to touch from one or another angle the basic principles of life common to all humanity as well as to the poet — the center within us all where "truth abides in fulness."

This would seem an even more complete fusing of the two faculties in one poet than that spoken of by Browning, where a poet would issue successive works, in some of them the one faculty and in some of them the other faculty being supreme.

That Browning was, to a certain extent, a poet of this third order of which he prophesied is true, for he has written a number of poems like "La Saisiaz," "Reverie," various of his prologues and epilogues which are purely subjective in content. There are also subjective passages in the midst of other poems, like those in "Sordello," "Prince Hohenstiel," the "Parleyings," etc. If we place such a poem as "Reverie" side by side with "Fra Lippo Lippi" we see well-nigh perfect illustrations of the two faculties as they existed in the one poet, Browning. On the other

hand, in those poems where the thought, as I have said, suggests Browning, in the speech of his characters he has something of the quality of what Browning calls the subjective poet of modern classification. "Gifted like the objective poet, with the fuller perception of nature and man, he is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the One above him, the supreme intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth, an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's soul."

Browning may be said to have carried to its flood tide the "Liberal Movement in English Literature," as Courthope calls it, inaugurated at the dawn of the century by the Lake School, which reacted against the correct school of Dryden and Pope. Along with the earlier poets of the century he shared lack of appreciation at the hands of critics in general. The critics had been bred in the school of the eighteenth century, and naturally would be incapable of understanding a man whose thought was permeated with the doctrines of evolution, then an unknown quantity except to the elect in scientific circles, and not to become the possession of the thinking world at large until beyond the

middle of the century; whose soul was full of the ardor of democracy, shown not only in his choice and treatment of subjects, but in his reckless independence of all the shibboleths of the past; and whose liberalness in the treatment of moral and religious problems was such as to scandalize many in an age when the law forbade that a man should marry his deceased wife's sister, and when the Higher Criticism of the Bible had not yet migrated to England from Germany; and, finally, whose style was everything that was atrocious because entirely different from anything they had seen before.

The century had to grow up to him. It is needless to say that it did so. Just as out of the turmoil of conflicting scientific and religious thought has emerged a serene belief in man's spiritual destiny, so out of the turmoil of conflicting schools of criticism has arisen a perception of the value of the new, the original, the different in art. Critics begin to apply the principles of evolution to their criticism as Browning applied it to his art, with the result that they no longer measure by past standards of art but by relating the art to the life of the time in its various manifestations, not forgetting that the poet or the dramatist may have a further vision of

what is to come than any other man of his age.

The people first, for the most part, found out that here in Browning's work was a new force, and calmly formed themselves into groups to study what manner of force it might be, regardless of the sneers of newspaperdom and conventional academies. And gradually to the few appreciative critics of the early days have been added one authoritative voice after another until the chorus of praise has become a large one, and Browning, though later than any great poet of the century, is coming into his own.

In a certain chart of English literature with which I am acquainted, wherein the poets are graphically represented in mountain ranges with peaks of various heights, Tennyson is shown as the towering peak of the Victorian Era, while Browning is a sturdy but much lower peak with a blunted top. This is quite symbolic of the general attitude toward Browning at the end of the century, for, with all the appreciation, there has been on the part of authority a disinclination to assign to him the chief place among the poets of the Victorian Era. Courthope, who most of the time preserves a remarkable reticence upon Browning, voices this general attitude

in a remark ventured upon in one of his lectures in 1900. He says:

"No one who is capable of appreciating genius will refuse to admire the powers of this poet, the extent of his sympathy and interest in external things, the boldness of his invention, the energy of his analysis, the audacity of his experiments. But so absolutely does he exclude all consideration for the reader from his choice of subject, so arbitrarily, in his treatment of his themes, does he compel his audience to place themselves at his own point of view, that the life of his art depends entirely upon his own individuality. Should future generations be less inclined than our own to surrender their imagination to his guidance, he will not be able to appeal to them through that element of life which lies in the Universal."

To the present writer this seems simply like a confession on Courthope's part that he was unable to perceive in Browning the elements of the Universal which are most assuredly there, and which were fully recognized by a Scotch writer, Dawson, at the same time that Courthope was questioning his power to hold coming generations.

"The fashions of the world may change," writes Dawson, "and the old doubts may

wear themselves out and sink like shadows out of sight in the morning of a stronger faith; but even so the world will still turn to the finer poems of Browning for intellectual stimulus, for the purification of pity and of pathos, for the exaltation of hope.

"Or if the darkness still thickens, all the more will men turn to this strong man of the race, who has wrestled and prevailed; who has illumined with imaginative insight the deepest problems of the ages; who has made his poetry not merely the vehicle of pathos, passion, tenderness, fancy, and imagination, but also of the most robust and masculine thought. He has written lyrics which must charm all who love, epics which must move all who act, songs which must cheer all who suffer, poems which must fascinate all who think; and when 'Time hath sundered shell from pearl,' however stern may be the scrutiny, it may be said that there will remain enough of Robert Browning to give him rank among the greatest of poets, and secure for him the sure reward of fame."

But it is to France we must go for the surest authoritative note — that land of the Academy and correct taste which *hums* and *hahs* over its own Immortals in proverbially unpen-

etrating conclave. No less a man than Taine declares that Browning stands first among English poets — "the most excellent where excellence is greatness, the most gifted where genius is a common dower."

While there can be no doubt that Browning outdid all the other great poets of his time in "azure feats," in developing an absolutely self-centered ideal of art, which is yet so true to the ultimate tendencies of the century, indeed to those of all time, for evolution and democracy are henceforth the torch-bearers of the human soul — each of the other half-dozen or so greatest poets had distinct and independent individualities which were more nearly the outcome of the current tendencies of the time than Browning's.

Tennyson was equally familiar with the thought and much more familiar with the politics of the day, but there is an infinite difference in their attitude. Browning, if I may be excused for quoting one of Shakespeare's most abused phrases, rides over the century like a "naked new-born babe striding the blast." Tennyson ambles through it on a palfrey which has a tendency to flounder into every slough of despond it comes to. This may seem to be putting it rather too



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strongly, but is it not true? Browning has the vision belonging to the latest child of time. He never follows; he leads. With his eyes fixed upon a far-off future where man shall be *man* at last, he faces every problem with the intrepidity of an Œdipus confronting the Sphynx. The mystery of its riddles has no terrors for him. It is given to him as to few others to see the ineffable beauty of life's mystery, the promise it holds out of eternal joy. While he frequently discourses upon the existence of evil, he never for a moment admits any doubt into his own utmost soul of the beneficent part evil is meant to play in the molding of human destinies. Mr. Santayana has called him a barbarous poet. In a certain sense he is, if to be born among the first on a new plane of psychic perception where of no account become the endless metaphysical meanderings of the intellect, which cry "proof, proof, where there can be no proof," is barbarous. It was doubtless largely owing to this power of vision reminding us again somewhat of the child's in Maeterlinck's "Les Aveugles" which kept Browning from tinkering in the half-measures of the political leaders of his time. His plane is not unlike that of his own Lazarus, about whom the Arab physician says:

"The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armament
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds —
'Tis one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact, — he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness,
(For as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we, too, see not with his opened eyes."

The import of an event is everything. Large imports may lurk more surely in the awakening of some obscure soul than in the pageantry of law bringing a tardy and wholly inadequate measure of justice to humanity. Though Tennyson talks of the "far-off divine event" he has no burning conviction of it and does not ride toward it with triumph in his eye and flaming joy in his soul. As he ambles along, steeping himself in the science of the time, its revelations make him nervous; he falls into doubt from which he can only extricate himself by holding on to belief, a very different thing from Browning's vision.

Thus it happens that Tennyson voices the

feelings of an immense class of cultured people, who have gone through the century in the same ambling fashion, a prey to its fears, intellectual enough to see the truths of science, but not spiritual enough to see the import of the dawn of the new day.

Tennyson, then, quite of and in his time, would desire above all things to appeal to it as it appealed to him. He waxes enthusiastic over conventional politics, he treats his social problems so entirely in accordance with the conventions of the day that they are not problems at all, and he is quite in love with the beauty of aristocratic society, though he occasionally descends to the people for a subject. These are all entirely sufficient reasons for his popularity as a poet during his life, further emphasized by the added fact that having no subject matter (that is thought-content) wherewith to startle the world by strangeness, he took the wiser part of delighting them with his exquisite music.

Though so satisfactory a representative of his times, he did outrage one of the shibboleths of the critics in his efforts to find a new and richer music than poets had before used by bringing scientific imagery into his verse. Of all the absurd controversies indulged in

by critics, the most absurd is that fought out around the contention that science and poetry cannot be made to harmonize. Wordsworth was keen enough to see this before the rest of the world and prophesied in the preface to his "Lyrical Ballads" that science would one day become the closest of allies to poetry, and Tennyson was brilliant enough to seize the new possibilities in scientific language with a realization that nature imagery might almost be made over by the use in describing it of scientific epithets. A famous illustration of the happy effects he produced by these means is in the lines 'Move eastward happy Earth and round again to-night." His observation of Nature, moreover, had a scientific accuracy, which made possible far more delicate and individual descriptions of Nature's aspects than had been produced before. It was also a happy thought for him to weave so much of his poetry around the Arthurian legends. Beautiful in themselves, they came nearer home than classical or Italian legends, and, when made symbolic of an ideal which must appeal to the heart of every cultured Englishman, who regarded himself as a sort of prototype of the blameless King Arthur, and whose grief at the failure of the social fabric planned by him would be as poignant

as that of the King himself, they carried with them a romantic and irresistible attraction.

The reasons why Tennyson should appeal especially to the nineteenth century cultured and highly respectable Englishman far outweighed any criticisms that might be made by critics on his departure from poetic customs of the past. He pleased the highest powers in the land, became Laureate and later Lord Tennyson. He will therefore always remain the poet most thoroughly representative of that especial sort of beauty belonging to a social order which has reached a climax of refinement and intelligence, but which, through its very self-satisfaction, cuts itself off from a perception of the true value of the new forces coming into play in the on-rushing stream of social development.

The other poets who divide with Browning and Tennyson the highest honors of the Victorian Era are Landor, Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris, Mrs. Browning, George Meredith.

Landor and Arnold preserved more than any of the others a genuine classical aroma in their verse, and on this account have always been delighted in by a few. After all, the people may not immediately accept a poet of too great independence, but they are least of

all likely to grow enthusiastic over anything reactionary either in style or thought. Romantic elements of not too startling a character win the favor of most readers.

Though classic in style both these poets reflected phases of the century's thought. Landor differed from Browning in the fact that he frequently expressed himself vigorously upon the subject of current politics. His political principles were not of the most advanced type, however. He believed in the notion of a free society, but seems to have thought the best way of attaining it would be a commonwealth in which the wise should rule, and see that the interests of all should be secured. Still his insistence upon liberty, however old-fashioned his ideas of the means by which it should be maintained, puts him in the line of the democratic march of the century.

Swinburne calls him his master, and represents himself in verse as having learned many wise and gracious things of him, but his thought was not sufficiently progressive to triumph over the classicism of his style in an age of romantic poetry, though there will always be those who hold on to the shibboleth that, after all, the classic is the real thing in poetry, never realizing that where the romantic is old enough, it, too, becomes classic.

Matthew Arnold stands in poetry where men like Huxley and Clifford stood in science, who, Childe-Roland like, came to the dark tower, calmly put the slug horn to their lips and blew a blast of courage. Science had undermined their belief in a future life as well as destroying the revealed basis of moral action. In such a man the intellectual nature overbalances the intuitional, and when inherited belief based on authority is destroyed, there is nothing but the habit of morality left.

Arnold has had the sympathy of those who could no longer believe in their revealed religion, but who loved it and regretted its passing away from them. He gives expression to this feeling in lines like these:

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

The regret for something beautiful that is gone is capable of exquisite poetic treatment, but it is not an abiding note of the century. It represents only one phase of its thought,

and that a transcient one, because it could be felt with poignancy only by those whose lives were rudely shaken by the destruction of the ideal in which they had been bred and in which they devoutly believed. Arnold's sympathetic treatment of this phase of doubt seems, however, to have been of incalculable service to those who felt as he did. It softened the anguish of the shock to have not only the beauty of the past dwelt upon, but to have the beauty of courage in the face of a destroyed ideal erected into a new ideal for living brave and noble lives. In "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" is a fine example of the beauty which may be imparted to a mood as melancholy as could well be imagined:

"Not as their friend, or child, I speak!
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone —
For both were faiths, and both are gone.

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn,
Their faith, my tears, the world deride —
I come to shed them at their side."

Such hope as he has to offer comes out in

stanzas like the following, but all is dependent upon strenuous living:

"No, no! the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;
And he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,
From strength to strength advancing — only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battle won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life."

Nor shall better days on earth come without struggle since life

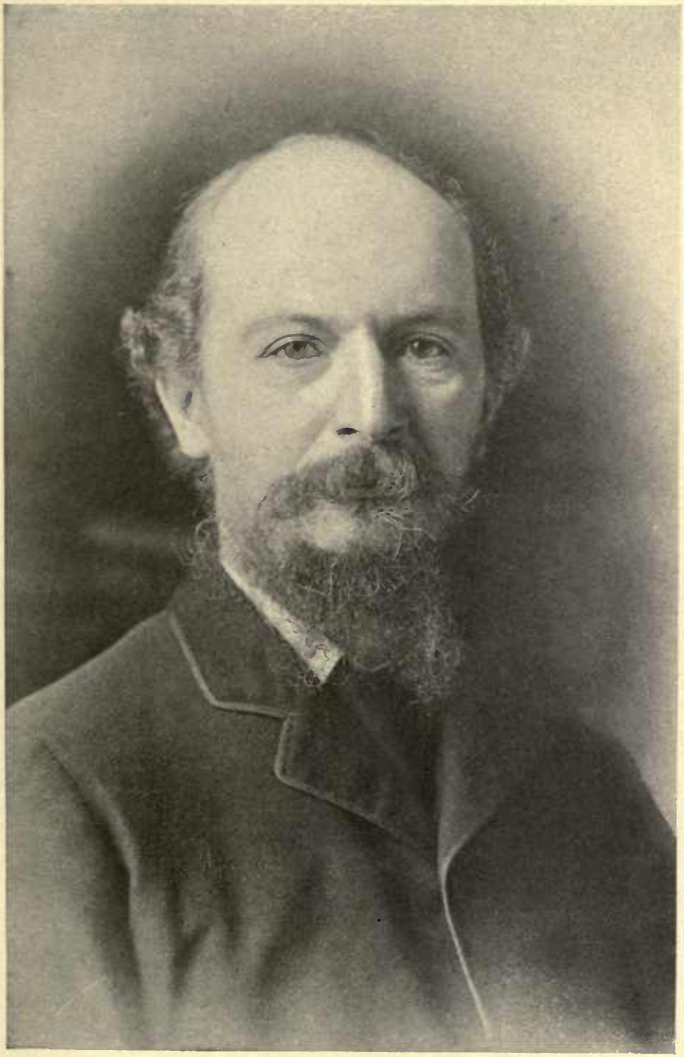
"Is on all sides o'ershadowed by the high
Uno'erleaped Mountains of Necessity,
Sparing us narrower margin than we deem.
Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
When, bursting through the network, superposed
By selfish occupation — plot and plan,
Lust, avarice, envy-liberated man,
All difference with his fellow-mortal closed,
Shall be left standing face to face with God."

Though Arnold was sternly criticised he had before the end of the century been accorded his proper place as a poet, which was that of the chief poet between the greatest lights of the century, Browning and Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelite group. Gosse, with more penetration than can always be accorded to him, declares that "His devotion to beauty, the composure, simplicity and dignity of his

temper, and his deep moral sincerity gave to his poetry a singular charm which may prove as durable as any element in modern verse."

The phase of romanticism carried to its climax by the pre-Raphaelite poets Rossetti and his sister, Morris and Swinburne had, like the work of Tennyson, its full recognition, in its own time, because these poets, like him, have put into exquisite music romantic subjects derived both from the classics and from mediæval legend. The new note of sensuousness, due largely to the Italian influence of Rossetti, with his sensuous temperament, his intensity of passion and his love of art, and also in Morris and Swinburne to their pagan feeling, one of the elements inaugurated by the general breaking down of orthodox religious ideals through the encroachments of science, does not seem to have affected their popularity.

As there were those who would sympathize with the Tennysonian attitude toward doubt, and those who would sympathize with Matthew Arnold's, there were others to feel like Swinburne, pantheistic, and, like Morris, utterly hopeless of a future, while others again might criticise the pagan feeling, but, with their inheritance of beauty from Tennyson and his predecessors of the dawn of the century, would



A. C. Swinburne

delight in these new developments of the romantic spirit.

Ruskin is said to have been the original inspirer of these four poets, though Fitz-Gerald's "Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyám was not without its influence. But as Edmund Gosse says, "The attraction of the French romances of chivalry for William Morris, of Tuscan painting for D. G. Rossetti, of the spirit of English Gothic architecture for Christina Rossetti, of the combination of all these with Greek and Elizabethan elements for Swinburne, were to be traced back to start — words given by the prophetic author of the "Seven Lamps of Architecture.'"

Though the first books of this group of poets, the "Defence of Guenevere" (1858), "Goblin Market," "Early Italian Poets," "Queen Mother and Rosamond" (1861), did not make any impression on the public, with the publication of Swinburne's "Atalanta in Calydon" an interest was awakened which reached a climax with the publication of Rossetti's poems in 1870. Rossetti had thrown these poems into his wife's grave, as the world knows, but was prevailed upon to have them recovered and published.

In the success of this group was vindicated at last the principles of the naturalists of the

dawn of the century. Here was a mixture of color, of melody, of mysticism, of sensuousness, of elaboration of form which carried originality and independence as far as it could well go in a direction which painted life primarily from the outside. But when this brilliant culminating flash of the early school of Coleridge and Keats began to burn itself out, there was Tennyson, who might be called the conservative wing of the romantic movement, dominant as ever, and Browning, the militant wing, advanced from his mid-century obscurity into a flood-tide of appreciation which was to bear him far onward toward literary preeminence, placing him among the few greatest names in literature.

The originality of the pre-Raphaelites grew out of their welding of romantic, classical, and mediæval elements, tempered in each case by the special mental attitude of the poet.

Rossetti and his brother artists, Millais and Holman Hunt, who founded the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood of painters, pledged themselves to the fundamental principle laid down by Rossetti in the little magazine they started called the *Germ*. This new creed was simple enough and ran: "The endeavor held in view throughout the writings on art will

be to encourage and enforce an entire adherence to the simplicity of Nature."

In their interpretation and development of this simple principle, artists and the poets who joined them differentiated from one another often to a wide extent. In Rosetti, it becomes an adoration of the beauty of woman expressed in ultra-sensuous though not in sensual imagery, combined with an atmosphere of religious wonder such as one finds in mediæval poets, of which "The Blessed Damozel" stands as a typical example. In it, as one appreciator has said, all the qualities of Rossetti's poetry are found. "He speaks alternately like a seer and an artist; one who is now bewitched with the vision of beauty, and now is caught up into Paradise, where he hears unutterable things. To him the spiritual world is an intense reality. He hears the voices, he sees the presences of the supernatural. As he mourns beside the river of his sorrow, like Ezekiel, he has his visions of winged and wheeling glory, and leaning over the ramparts of the world his gaze is fixed on the uncovered mysteries of a world to come. There is no poet to whom the supernatural has been so much alive. Religious doubt he seems never to have felt. But the temper of religious wonder, the old, childlike, monk-

ish attitude of awe and faith in the presence of the unseen, is never absent in him. The artistic force of his temperament drives him to the worship of beauty; the poetic and religious forces to the adoration of mystery."

To Swinburne the simplicity of nature included the utmost lengths to which eroticism could go. Upon this ground he has been severely censured and he has had an unfortunate influence upon scores and scores of younger writers who have seemed to think that the province of the poet is to decry the existence of sincere affection, and who in their turn have exercised actual mischief in lowering social standards.

This is not all of Swinburne, however. His superb metrical power is his chief contribution to the originality of this group, and when he developed away from his nauseating eroticism, he could charm as no one else with his delicious music, though it often be conspicuous for its lack of richness in thought.

His fate has been somewhat different from that of most poets. When his "Atalanta in Calydon" was published it was received with enthusiasm, but the volumes overweighted with eroticism which followed caused a fierce controversy, and many have not even yet discovered that this was only one phase of

Swinburne's art, and that, unfortunate as it is in many respects, it was a phase of the century's life which must find its expression in art if that life is to be completely given, and that it was a passing phase Swinburne himself proved in the development of other phases shown in his interest in current political situations, his enthusiasm for Italy and his later expressions of high moral ideals, as well as in a quasi-religious attitude of mind, not so far from that of Emerson, himself, in which strong emphasis is placed upon the importance of the individual, and upon the unity of God and man.

There is moral courage and optimism in the face of doubt of a high order in the following lines:

—"Are ye not weary and faint not by the way
Seeing night by night devoured of day by day,
Seeing hour by hour consumed in sleepless fire?
Sleepless; and ye too, when shall ye, too sleep?
— We are weary in heart and head, in hands and feet,
And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,
Than all things save the inexorable desire
Which whoso knoweth shall neither faint nor weep.

"Is this so sweet that one were fain to follow?
Is this so sure when all men's hopes are hollow,
Even this your dream, that by much tribulation
Ye shall make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight?

— Nay though our life were blind, our death were fruitless,
Not therefore were the whole world's high hope rootless;
But man to man, nation would turn to nation,
And the old life live, and the old great word be great."

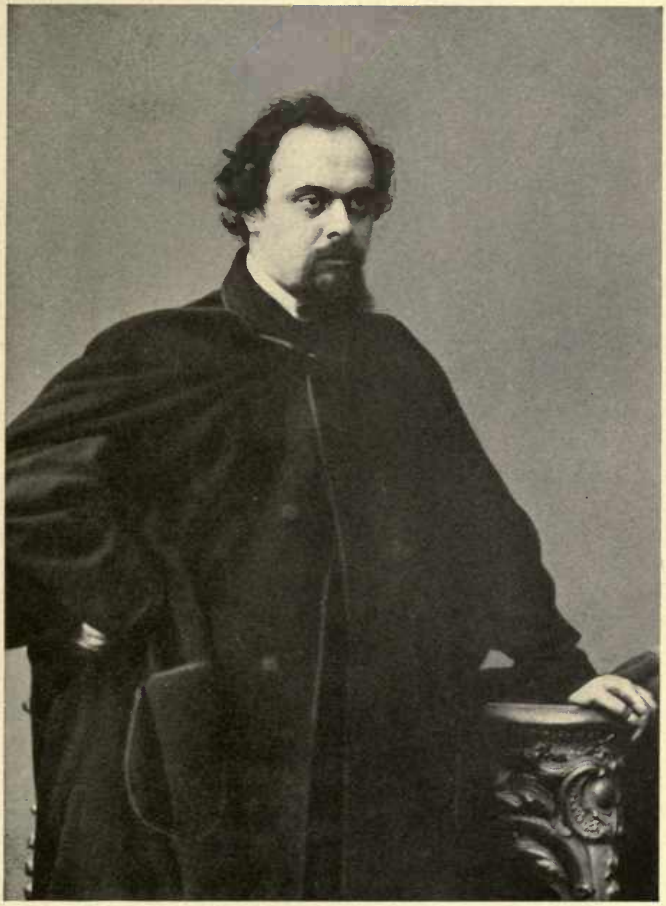
But Swinburne in his farthest reaches of pantheistic aspiration is to be seen in a poem like "Hertha":

"I am that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily; I am the soul.

"The tree many-rooted
That swells to the sky
With frondage red-fruited
The life-tree am I;
In the buds of your lives is the sap of my leaves; ye shall live and not die.

"But the Gods of your fashion
That take and that give,
In their pity and passion
That scourge and forgive,
They are worms that are bred in the bark that falls off; they shall die and not live.

"My own blood is what stanches
The wounds in my bark:
Stars caught in my branches
Make day of the dark,
And are worshipped as suns till the sunrise shall tread out their fires as a spark."



DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

Morris's interpretation of pre-Raphaelite tenets took him into mediæval legend and the classics for his subject matter. In his first volume, "The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems," he came into competition with Tennyson, who was at the same time issuing his Arthurian legends. The polish of Tennyson's verse, as well as its symbolical meaning for the time, was more acceptable than the actual return to the nature of the fifteenth century, and this the first volume from a pre-Raphaelite was hardly noticed by the critics. Morris sulked within his literary tents for ten years before he again appeared, this time with "The Life and Death of Jason" (1867), which immediately became popular. Later came the "Earthly Paradise." These tales, in verse noble and simple, in style recalling the tales of Chaucer, yet with a charm all their own, in which the real men and women of Chaucer give place to types, have been the delight of those who like to find in poetry a dreamland of romance where they may enjoy themselves far from the problems and toils of everyday life. He differs from all the other poets of this group in his lack of religious hope. His mind was of the type that could not stand up against the undermining influences of the age: hence

world-weariness and despair are the constantly recurring notes.

Mrs. Browning far outdistanced her husband in the early days in popularity. She pleased the people by her social enthusiasm, a characteristic more marked in her verse than in that of any of the poets mentioned. The critics have found many faults in her style, mainly those growing out of an impassioned nature which carried her at times beyond the realm of perfectly balanced art. But even an English critic of the conservatism of Edmund Gosse could at last admit that "In some of her lyrics and more rarely in her sonnets she rose to heights of passionate humanity which place her only just below the great poets of her country."

Contemporary criticism of "Aurora Leigh," which was certainly a departure both in form and matter from the accepted standards, was, on the whole, just. *The Quarterly Review* in 1862 said of it: "This 'Aurora Leigh' is a great poem. It is a wonder of art. It will live. No large audience will it have, but it will have audience; and that is more than most poems have. To those who know what poetry is and in what struggles it is born — how the great thoughts justify themselves — this work will be looked upon as one of the

wonders of the age." Mrs. Browning resembles her husband in the fact that she does not fit into the main line of evolution of the romantic school, but is an individual manifestation of the romantic spirit, showing almost as great freedom from the trammels of accepted romanticism as Browning does.

The writer of the century whose experience as a novelist almost paralleled that of Browning as poet was Meredith. Because of his psychological analysis and the so-called obscurity of his style, he waited many years for recognition and finally was accepted as one of the most remarkable novelists of the age. His poetry, showing similar tendencies, and overshadowed by his novels, has not yet emerged into the light of universal appreciation. One finds it even ignored altogether in the most recent books of English literature, yet he is the author of one of the most remarkable series of sonnets in the English language, "Modern Love," presenting, as it does, a vivid picture of domestic decadence which forms a strange contrast to Rossetti's sonnets, "The House of Life," indicating how many and various have been the forces at work during the nineteenth century in the disintegrating and molding of social ideals. Meredith writes of "Hiding the Skeleton".

"At dinner she is hostess, I am host.
Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
The topic over intellectual deeps
In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball:
It is in truth a most contagious game;
Hiding the Skeleton shall be its name.
Such play as this the devils might appall,
But here's the greater wonder; in that we,
Enamor'd of our acting and our wits,
Admire each other like true hypocrites.
Warm-lighted glances, Love's Ephemeral,
Shoot gayly o'er the dishes and the wine.
We waken envy of our happy lot.
Fast sweet, and golden, shows our marriage-knot.
Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light shine!"

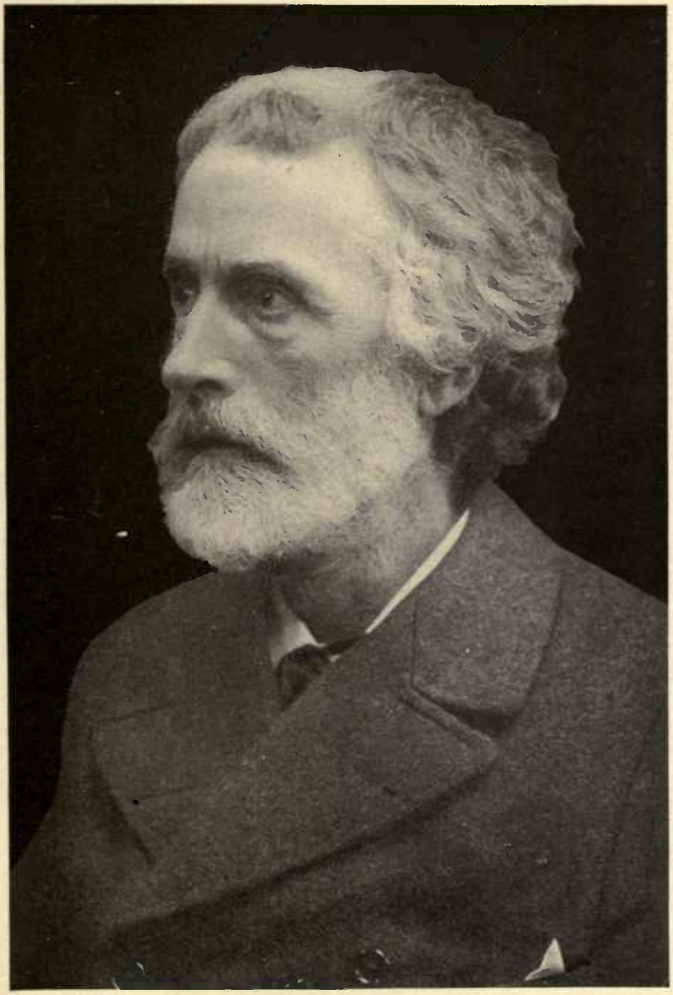
Rossetti writes "Lovesight":

"When do I see thee most, beloved one?
When in the light the spirits of mine eyes
Before thy face, their altar, solemnize
The worship of that Love through thee made known?
Or when, in the dusk hours (we two alone),
Close-kiss'd and eloquent of still replies
Thy twilight — hidden glimmering visage lies,
And my soul only sees thy soul its own?
O love, my love! if I no more should see
Thyself, nor on the earth the shadow of thee,
Nor image of thine eyes in any spring, —
How then should sound upon Life's darkening slope,
The ground-whirl of the perish'd leaves of Hope,
The wind of Death's imperishable wing?"

Browning's criticism of painting was evidently much influenced by the pre-Raphaelites. Their admiration for the painters who preceded Raphael, revealing as it did to them an art not satisfied with itself, but reaching after higher things, and earnestly seeking to interpret nature and human life, is echoed in his "Old Pictures in Florence," which was written but six years after Hunt, Millais, and Rossetti formed their brotherhood. In poetry, they did not eschew classical subjects, as Browning did for the most part, but they treated these subjects in a romantic spirit, and so removed them from the sort of strictures that Browning made upon the perfection of Greek art.

From this summary of the chief lines of literary development in the nineteenth century it will be seen, not only what a marvelous age it has been for the flowering of individualism in literary invention, but how Browning has surpassed all the other poets of note in the wideness of his departure from accepted standards, and how helpless the earlier critics were in the face of this departure, because of their dependence always upon critical shibboleths — in other words, of principles not sufficiently universal — as their means of measuring a poet's greatness. Tennyson and the

pre-Raphaelites won their popularity sooner among critics because they followed logically in the line of development inaugurated by the earlier poets, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, etc., whose poetry had already done some good work in breaking down the school of Dryden and Pope, though it succeeded only in erecting another standard not sufficiently universal to include Browning. The evolution of art forms, a principle so clearly understood, as we have shown by Browning, has never become a guiding one with critics, though Mr. Gosse in his "Modern English Literature" has expressed a wish that the principle of evolution might be adapted to criticism. He has evidently felt how hopeless is the task of appraising poets by the old individualistic method, which, as he says, has been in favor for at least a century. It possesses, he declares, considerable effectiveness in adroit hands, but is, after all, an adaptation of the old theory of the unalterable type, merely substituting for the one authority of the ancients an equal rigidity in a multitude of isolated modern instances. For this inflexible style of criticism he proposes that a scientific theory shall be adopted which shall enable us at once to take an intelligent pleasure in Pope and in Wordsworth, in Spenser and in Swift. He writes:



GEORGE MEREDITH

"Herbert Spencer has, with infinite courage, opened the entire world of phenomena to the principles of evolution, but we seem slow to admit them into the little province of æsthetics. We cling to the individualist manner, to that intense eulogy which concentrates its rays on the particular object of notice and relegates all others to proportional obscurity. There are critics of considerable acumen and energy who seem to know no other mode of nourishing a talent or a taste than that which is pursued by the cultivators of gigantic gooseberries. They do their best to nip off all other buds, that the juices of the tree of fame may be concentrated on their favorite fruit. Such a plan may be convenient for the purposes of malevolence, and in earlier times our general ignorance of the principles of growth might well excuse it. But it issurely time that we should recognize only two criteria of literary judgment. The first is primitive, and merely clears the ground of rubbish; it is, Does the work before us, or the author, perform what he sets out to perform with a distinguished skill in the direction in which his powers are exercised? If not, he interests the higher criticism not at all; but if yes, then follows the second test: Where, in the vast and ever-shifting scheme of literary evolution, does he take his place,

and in what relation does he stand, not to those who are least like him, but to those who are of his own kith and kin?"

With such principles of criticism as this, the public would sooner be brought to an appreciation of all that is best worth while in literature, instead of being taken, as it too often is, upon a wrong scent to worship at the shrine of the Nokes and Stokes, who simply print blue and eat the turtles.

If Mr. Gosse had himself been fully imbued with such principles would he have made the statement quoted in chapter two in regard to Browning's later books? And should we have such senseless criticism as a remark which has become popular lately, and which I believe emanated from a university in the South — namely, that Browning never said anything that Tennyson had not said better? As an illustration of this a recent critic may be quoted who is entirely scornful of the person who prefers Browning's

"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world"

to Tennyson's

"And hear at times a sentinel
Who moves about from place to place,
And whispers to the worlds of space
In the deep night that all is well."

One might reply to this that it is a matter of taste had not Courthope shown conclusively that Matthew Arnold's criterion of criticism—namely, that a taste which is born of culture is the only certain possession by which the critic can measure the beauty of a poet's line—is a fallacy. His argument is worth quoting:

"You have stated strongly one side of the truth, but you have ignored, completely ignored, the other. You have asserted the claims of individual liberty, and up to a certain point I agree with you. I do not deny that spiritual liberty is founded on consciousness, and hence the self-consciousness of the age is part of the problem we are considering. I do not deny that the prevailing rage for novelty must also be taken into account. Liberty, variety, novelty, are all necessary to the development of Art. Without novelty there can be no invention, without variety there can be no character, without liberty there can be no life. Life, character, invention, these are of the essence of Poetry. But while you have defended with energy the freedom of the Individual, you have said nothing of the authority of society. And yet the conviction of the existence of this authority is a belief perhaps even more firmly founded in the human mind than the sentiment as to the rights of individual liberty. . . .

The great majority of the professors of poetry, however various their opinions, however opposite their tastes, have felt sure that there was in taste, as in science, a theory of false and true; in art, as in conduct, a rule of right and wrong. And even among those who have asserted most strongly the inward and relative nature of poetry, do you think there was one so completely a skeptic as to imagine that he was the sole proprietor of the perception he sought to embody in words; one who doubted his power, by means of accepted symbols, to communicate to his audience his own ideas and feelings about

external things? Yet until some man shall have been found bold enough to defend a thesis so preposterous, we must continue to believe that there is a positive standard, by which those at least who speak a common language may reason about questions of taste.

Armed with this gracious permission on the part of a professor of poetry, we may venture to reason a little upon the foregoing quotations from Tennyson and Browning to the effect that the person of really good taste might like each of them in its place. While Tennyson's mystical quatrain is beautiful and quite appropriate in such a poem as "In Memoriam," it would not be in the least appropriate from the lips of a little silk-winding girl as she wanders through the streets of Asolo on a sunny morning singing her little songs. She is certainly a more lifelike child speaking Browningese, as she has often been criticised for doing, than she would be if upon this occasion she spoke in a Tennysonian manner. That her song has touched the hearts of the twentieth century, if it was not altogether appreciated in the nineteenth, is proved by the fact that it is one of the most popular songs of the day as set by Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, and that the line is heard upon the lips of people to-day who do not even know whose it is, and herein lies the ultimate test of greatness.

VI.

CLASSIC SURVIVALS

BEFORE passing in review Browning's treatment of classical subjects as compared with the other great poets of the nineteenth century, it will be interesting to take a glimpse at his choice of subject-matter in general.

To compare Browning's choice of subject-matter with that of other English poets is to strike at the very root of his position in the chain of literary development. Subject-matter is by no means simple in its nature, but as a musical sound is composed of vibrations within vibrations, so it is made up of the complex relations of body and spirit — the mere external facts of the story are blended with such philosophical undercurrent, or dramatic *motif*, or unfolding of the hidden springs of action as the poet is able to insinuate into it.

However far back one penetrates in the history of poetry, poets will be found depending largely upon previous sources, rather than upon their own creative genius, for the body

of their subject-matter, until the question presents itself with considerable force as to who could have been the mysterious first poet who supplied plots to the rest of mankind. Conjecture is obliged to play a part here, as it does wherever human origins are in question. Doubtless, this first poet was no separate individual, but simply the elements man and nature, through whose action and reaction upon each other grew up story-forms, evidently compounded of human customs, and observed natural phenomena such as those we find in the great Hindu, Greek, and Teutonic classics, and which thus crystallized became great well-springs of inspiration for future generations of poets.

Each new poet, however, who is worthy of the name, sets up his own particular interplay with man and nature; and however much he may be indebted for his inspiration to past products of this universal law of action and reaction, he is bound to use them or interpret them in a manner colored by his own personal and peculiar relations with the universe.

In so doing he supplies the more important spiritual side of subject-matter and becomes in very truth the poet or maker, to that extent at least which Browning himself lays down as the province of art — namely, to arrange,

"Dissociate, redistribute, interchange
Part with part: lengthen, broaden
. . . simply what lay loose
At first lies firmly after, what design
Was faintly traced in hesitating line
Once on a time grows firmly resolute
Henceforth and evermore."

Sometimes the poet's power of arranging and redistributing and interchanging carries him upward into the realm of ideas alone, among which his imagination plays in absolute freedom; he throws over the results of man's past dallyings with Nature and makes his own terms with her, and the result is an approach to absolute creation.

Except in the case of lyric poetry the instances where there have been no suggestions as to subject-matter are rare in comparison with those where the subject-matter has been derived from some source.

Look, for instance, at the father of English poetry, Chaucer, how he ransacked French, Italian and Latin literature for his subject-matter, most conscientiously carrying out his own saying, that

"Out of olde feldys as men sey
Comyth all this newe corn from yere to yere,
And out of olde books in good fey
Cometh all this new science that men alere."

How external a way he had of working over old materials, especially in his earlier work, is well illustrated in "The Parliament of Fowls," which he opens by relating the dream of Scipio, originally contained in Cicero's treatise on the "Republic," and preserved by Macrobius. This dream, which tells how Africanus appears to Scipio, and carries him up among the stars of the night, shows him Carthage, and prophesies to him of his future greatness, tells him of the blissful immortal life that is in store for those who have served their country, points out to him the brilliant celestial fires, and how insignificant the earth is in comparison with them, and opens his ears to the wondrous harmony of the spheres — this dream is as far removed from the main argument of the poem as anything well could be: a contest between three falcons for the hand of a formel. The bringing together of such diverse elements presents no difficulties to the child-like stage of literary development that depends upon surface analogies for the linking together of its thoughts. Just as talking about his ancestor, the great Scipio Africanus, with the old King Masinissa caused Scipio to dream of him, so reading about this dream caused Chaucer, who has to close his book

and go to bed for want of a light, to dream of Scipio Africanus also, who "was come and stood right at his bedis syde."

Africanus then plays the part of conductor to Chancer in a manner suggestive not only of his relations to Scipio, but of Virgil's relation to Dante, and brings him to the great gateway and through it into the garden of love. The description is of the temple of Venus in Boccaccio's "La Teseide." There Nature and the "Fowls" are introduced and described, and at last the point is reached. Nature proclaims that it is St. Valentine's day, and all the fowls may choose them mates. The royal falcon is given first choice, and chooses the lovely formel that sits upon Nature's hand. Two other ardent falcons declare their devotion to the same fowl, and Nature, when the formel declares that she will serve neither Venus nor Cupid and asks a respite for a year, decides that the three shall serve their lady another year — a pretty allegory supposed to refer to the wooing of Blanche of Lancaster by John of Gaunt.

The main argument of this poem, when it finally is reached by artificially welding together rich links borrowed from other poets, is one of the few examples in Chaucer of subject-matter derived direct from a real

event, but the putting of it in an allegorical form at once lays him under obligations to his poetic predecessors, not only on Anglo-Saxon soil, but in France and Italy.

His most important contributions as an inventor are, of course, his descriptions of the Canterbury Pilgrims, which are the pure outcome of a keen observation of men and women at first hand. So lifelike are they that in them he has made the England of the fourteenth century live again. But how small a proportion of the bulk of the "Canterbury Tales" is contained in these glimpses of English life and manners. It is but the framework upon which luxuriate vines of fancy transplanted from many another garden, and even in its place resembling, if not borrowed from, Boccaccio.

The thoroughly human instincts of the poet assert themselves, however, in the choice of the tales which he puts into the mouths of his pilgrims. He allows a place to the crudities and even the vulgarities of common stories as well as to culture-lore. The magic of the East, the love tales of Italy, the wisdom of philosophers, the common stories of the people, all give up their wealth to his gentle touch. With a keen sense of propriety he, with few exceptions, gives each one of his

pilgrims a tale suited in its general tendency to the character of its narrator, and in the critical chatter of the pilgrims about the tales, reflects not only his own tastes, but that of the times, the opinions expressed frequently being most uncomplimentary in their tenor.

In fine, the life of reality and the life of books is spread out before Chaucer, and his observation of both is keen and interested; and this it is which makes him much more than the "great translator" that Eustace Les Champs called him, and settles the nature of the "subtle thing" called spirit contributed by the individuality of the poet to his subject-matter. He brings everything within the reach of human sympathy, because his way of putting a story into his own words is sympathetic. He was a combination of the story-teller, the scholar, the poet, and the critic. As a scholar he brings in learned allusions that are entirely extraneous to the action in hand; as the story-teller, he takes delight in the tales that both the poet and the people have told; as the poet, his imagination dresses up a story with a fresh environment, often anachronous, and sometimes he alters the moral tone of the characters. Cressida is an interesting example of this. But instead of the characters suggesting by

their own action and speech all the needed moral, Chaucer himself appears ever at hand to analyze and criticise and moralize, though he does it so delightfully that one hesitates to call him didactic. The result of all this is that the external form and the underlying essence of his subject-matter are not completely fused. We often see a sort of guileless working of the machinery of art, yet it is true, no doubt, though perhaps not to the extent insisted on by Morley, that he has something of the Shakespearian quality which enables him to show men as they really are, "wholly developed as if from within, not as described from without by an imperfect and prejudiced observer."

In his great work, Spenser is no less dependent upon sources for his inspiration, but there is a marked difference in his use of them. Although his range of observation is much narrower than Chaucer's, hardly extending at all into the realm of actual human effort, yet he makes an advance in so far as his powers of redistribution are much greater than Chaucer's.

The various knights of the "Fairy Queen" and their exploits are not modeled directly upon any previous stories, but they are made up of incidents similar to those found

scattered all through classic lore; and as his inspirations were drawn in most cases directly from the fountain-head of story in the Greek writers — instead of as they filtered through the Latin, Italian, and French, with the inevitable accretions that result from migrations, — and from the comparatively unalloyed Arthurian legends, there is a clearer reflection in them of the cosmic elements that shine through both the Greek and Arthurian originals than is found in Chaucer.

Although Spenser was certainly unaware of any such modern refinement of the mythologist as a solar myth, yet the "Fairy Queen" forms a curious and interesting study on account of the survivals everywhere evident of solar characteristics in his characters and plots. Indeed it could hardly be otherwise, considering his intention, and his method of carrying it out, which he, himself, explains in his quaint letter to Sir Walter Raleigh— namely, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." He goes on:

"I close the history of King Arthur as most fit for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many men's former works, and also further from danger and envy of suspicion of present time. In which I have followed all the antique poets historical; first Homer, who in the person of

Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governor and a virtuous man, the one in his 'Iliad,' the other in his 'Odyssey'; then Virgil, whose like intention was to do in the person of Æneas: After him, Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando, and lately Tasso dissevered them again, and formed both parts in two persons, the part which they in Philosophy call Ethice or virtues of a private man, colored in his Rinaldo, the other, named Politice, in his Godfieldo. By example of which excellent poets, I labor to portray in Arthur before he was King, the image of a brave Knight perfected in the twelve private moral virtues as Aristotle hath devised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve books."

In the fashioning of his knight he took Arthur, a hero whose life as it appears in the early romances is inextricably mingled with solar elements, and has built up his virtues upon other ancient solar heroes. Here are all the paraphernalia of solar mythology: invincible knights with marvelous weapons, brazen castles guarded by dragons, marriage with a beautiful maiden and parting from the bride to engage in new quests, an enchantress who turns men into animals, even the outcast child; but none of the incidents appear intact. It is as if there had been a great explosion in the ancient land of romance and that in the mending up of things the separate pieces are all recognizable, although all joined together in a different pattern, while under all is the

allegory. A gentle knight is no longer a solar hero as set forth by Max Müller or Cox, but Holiness; his invincible armor is not the all-powerful rays of the sun, but truth; the enchantress not night casting a spell over mortals, but sensuous pleasure entangling them.

These two poets, Chaucer and Spenser, are prototypes of two poet types of two poetical tendencies that have gone on developing side by side in English literature: Chaucer, democratic, interested supremely in the personalities of men and women, portraying the real, and Spenser, aristocratic, interested in imaging forth an ideal of manhood, choosing his subject-matter from sources that will lend themselves to such a purpose; Chaucer drawing his lessons out of the real actions of humanity; Spenser framing his story so that it will illustrate the moral he wishes to inculcate.

Shakespeare, of course, ranges himself in line with Chaucer. His interest centered on character, and wherever a story capable of character development presented itself, that he chose, altered it in outline comparatively little, and when he did so it was in order to carry forward the dramatic *motif* which he infused into his subject. The dramatic form

in which he wrote furnished him a better medium for reaching a complete welding together of the external and spiritual side of his subject-matter. Where Chaucer hinted at the possibilities of an artistic development of character that would cause the events of the story to appear as the inevitable outcome of the hidden springs of action, Shakespeare accomplished it, and peopled the world of imagination with group after group of living, acting characters.

In the nineteenth century Tennyson and Browning have represented, broadly speaking, these two tendencies. As with Spenser, the classics and the Arthurian legends have been the sources from which Tennyson has drawn most largely; but although a philosophical undercurrent is this poet's spiritual addition to the subject-matter, his method of putting his soul inside his work is very different from Spenser's. He does not tear the old myths to pieces and join them together again after a pattern of his own to fit his allegorical situation, but keeps the events of his stories almost unchanged, in this particular resembling Chaucer and Shakespeare, and — except in a few instances, such as Tithonus and Lucretius, where the classic spirit of the originals is preserved — he infuses in his subject a vein

of philosophy, illustrating those modern tendencies of English thought of which Tennyson, himself, was the exemplar. Even when inventing subjects, founded upon the experiences of everyday life, he so manipulates the story as to make it illustrate some of his favorite moral maxims. His characters do not act from motives which are the inherent necessities of their natures, but they act in accordance with Tennyson's preconceived notions of how they ought to act. He manipulates the elements of character to suit his own view of development, just as Spenser manipulated the elements of the story to suit his own allegorical purpose.

Browning is the nineteenth-century heir of Chaucer; but it is doubtful whether Chaucer would recognize his own offspring, so remarkable has the development been in those five centuries. With Chaucer's keen interest in human nature deepened to a profound insight into the very soul of humanity, and the added wealth of these centuries of human history, Browning not only had a far wider range of choice in subject-matter, but he was enabled to instil into it greater intellectual and emotional complexities.

Rarely has he treated any subject that has already been treated poetically unless

we except the transcripts from the classics soon to be considered. Wherever he saw an interesting historical personage, interesting, not on account of his brilliant achievements in the eyes of the world, but on account of potentialities of character, such a one he has set before us to reveal himself. There are between twenty and thirty portraits of this nature in his work, chosen from all sorts and conditions of men — men who stand for some phase of growth in human thought; and always in developing a personality he gives the kernel of truth upon which their peculiar point of view is based. Thus, among the musical poems, Abt Vogler speaks for the intuitionalist — he who is blessed by a glimpse of the absolute truth. Charles Avison, on the other hand, is the philosopher of the relative in music and the arts generally. Among the art poems, Fra Lippo Lippi is the apostle of beauty in realism, Andrea del Sarto the attainer of perfection in form. In the religious poems the Jewish standpoint is illustrated in "Saul" and "Rabbi Ben Ezra," the Christian in the portrait of John in "The Death in the Desert"; the empirical reasoner in "Paracelsus."

This is only one of Browning's methods in the choice and use of subject-matter. The

characters and incidents in his stories are frequently the result of pure invention, but he sets them in an environment recreated from history, developing their individualities in harmony with the environment, thus giving at one stroke the spirit of the time and the individual qualities of special representatives of the time. Examples of this are: "My Last Duchess," where the Duke is an entirely imaginary person and the particular incident is invented, but he is made to act and talk in a way perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the time — mediæval Italy. "Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" is another being of Browning's fancy, who yet represents to perfection the spirit of the old fugue writers. "Luria," "The Soul's Tragedy," "In a Balcony," all represent the same method.

Another plan pursued by the poet is either to invent or borrow a historical personage into whose mouth he puts the defence of some course of action or ethical standard that may or may not be founded upon the highest ideals. Sludge, the hero of "Fifine at the Fair," Bishop Blougram, Hohenstiel-Schwangau, range themselves in this group.

There are comparatively few cases where he has taken a complete story and developed

its spiritual possibilities without much change in external detail, but how adequate his art was to such ends, "The Ring and the Book," "Inn Album," "Two Poets of Croisic," "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," the historical dramas of "Strafford," and "King Victor and King Charles" fully prove, including, as they do, some of his finest masterpieces.

History and story have furnished many of the incidents which he has worked up in his dramatic lyrics and romances like "Clive," "Hervé Riel," "Donald," etc. There remains, however, a large number of poems containing some of Browning's loveliest work in which the subject-matter is, as far as we know, the creation of pure, unadulterated fancy. "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," "In a Balcony," "Colombe's Birthday," "Childe Roland," "James Lee's Wife" are some of them. Even in this rapid survey of the field the fact is patent that Browning's range of subject-matter is infinitely wider and his method of developing it far more varied than has been that of any other English poet. He seems the first to have completely shaken himself free from the trammels of classic or mediæval literature. There are no echoes of Arthur and his Knights in his poetry, the shadows of the Greek gods and goddesses exert no spell —

except in the few instances when he deliberately chose a Greek subject.

The fact that Browning was so free from classical influence in the great body of his work as compared with the other chief poets of the nineteenth century gives an especial interest to those poems in which he chose classical themes for his subjects. There are not more than ten all told, and one of these is a translation, yet they represent some of his finest and most original work, for Browning could not touch a classical theme without infusing into it that grasp and insight peculiar to his own genius.

His first and most conventionally classical poem is the fragment in "Men and Women," "Artemis Prologizes," written in 1842. It was to have been the introduction to a long poem telling of the mad love of Hippolytus for a nymph of Artemis, after that goddess had brought about his resuscitation. It has been suggested by Mr. Boynton in an interesting paper that Browning shows traces of the influence of Landor in his poetry. This fragment certainly furnishes argument for this opinion, though it has a strength of diction along with its Greek severity and terseness of style which leads to the conclusion that the influence came from the fountain head

of Greek poetry itself rather than through the lesser muse of this nineteenth-century Greek.

The poem is said to have been begun on a sick-bed and when the poet recovered he had forgotten or lost interest in his plans. This is to be regretted for if he had continued as he began, the poem would have stood unique in his work as a true survival of Greek subject wedded with classical form and style, and would certainly have challenged comparison with the best work done in this field by Landor or Swinburne, who tell over the classical stories or even invent new episodes, but, when all is said, do not write as if they were actually themselves Greeks.

There is no other instance in Browning of such a survival. In his other poems on Greek subjects it is Browning bringing Greek life to our ken with wonderful distinctness, but doing it according to his own accustomed poetical methods, or, as in "Ixion," a Greek story has been used as a symbol for the inculcating of a philosophy which is largely Browning's own.

In spite of the fact that he has turned to Greece so seldom for inspiration, his Greek poems range from such stirring pictures of Greek life and feeling as one gets in the splen-

did dramatic idyl "Pheidippides," based on a historical incident, through the imaginary "Cleon," in which is found the sublimated essence of Greek philosophical thought at the time of Christ — thought, weary of law and beauty, longing for a fresh inspiration, knowing not what, and unable to perceive it in the new ideal of love being taught by the Christians — to "Aristophanes' Apology," in which the Athens of his day, with its literary and political factions, is presented with a force and analysis which place it second only to "The Ring and the Book."

This poem taken, with Balaustion, gives the reader not only a comprehensive view of the historical atmosphere of the time but indirectly shows the poet's own attitude toward the literary war between Euripides and Aristophanes. So different are Browning's Greek poems from all other poems upon classical subjects that it will be interesting to dwell upon the most important of them at greater length than has been deemed necessary in the case of the more widely known and read of the poems.

"Cleon" links itself with the nineteenth century, because of its dealing with the problem of immortality, a problem which has been ever present in the mind of the century.

Cleon has, beside that type of synthetic mind which belongs to a ripe phase of civilization. Though he is a Greek and a pagan, he stretches hands across the centuries to men of the type of Morris or Matthew Arnold. He is the latest child of his own time, the heir of all the ages during which Greece had developed its æsthetic perfection, discovered the inadequacy of its established religion, come through its philosophers and poets to a perception of the immortality of the soul, and sunk again to a skepticism which had no vision of personal immortality at least, though among the stoics there were some who believed in an absorption into divine being. Cleon would fain believe in personal immortality but cannot, and, like Matthew Arnold, believes in facing death imperturbably.

In "Balaustion's Adventure" a historical tradition is used as the central episode of the poem, but life and romance are given to it by the creation of the heroine, Balaustion, a young Greek woman whose fascinating personality dominates the whole poem. She was a Rhodian, else her freedom of action and speech might seem too modern, but among the islands of Greece, at least at the time of Euripides, there still survived that attitude toward woman which we see reflected in the



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Homeric epics. Away from Athens, too, Euripides was a power; hence his defence is put into the mouth of one not an Athenian. She had saved a shipload of Athenian sympathizers by reciting Euripides when they were in danger from the hostile Syracusans.

Besides the romantic touch which is given the story by the creation of the lyric girl, there is an especial fitness in making the enthusiastic devotee of this poet a woman, for no one among the ancients has so fully and sympathetically portrayed woman in all her human possibilities of goodness and badness as Euripides, yet he has been called a woman-hater — because some of his men have railed against women — but one Alkestis is enough to offset any dramatic utterances of his men about women. The poet's attitude should be looked for in his power of portraying women of fine traits, not in any opinions expressed by his men. Furthermore, Browning had before him a model of Balaustion in her enthusiasm for Euripides, in Mrs. Browning. These circumstances are certainly sufficient to prove the appropriateness of making a Rhodian girl the defender of Euripides.

There is nothing more delicious in Browning than Balaustion's relation of "Alkestis," as she had seen it acted, to her three friends.

Her woman's comment and criticisms combine a Browning's penetration of the fine points in the play with a girl's idealism. Such a combination of masculine intellectualism and feminine charm has been known in women of all centuries. As the translation of the beautiful play of "Alkestis" proceeds, Balaustion interprets its art and moral, defending her favorite poet, not with the ponderousness of a grave critic weighing the influences which may have molded his genius, or calculating the pros and cons of his style, but with the swift appreciation of a mind and spirit full of the ardor of sympathy. Moreover, her talk of the play being a recollection of how it appeared to her as she saw it acted, the mere text is constantly enlarged upon and made vital with flashing glimpses of the action, as, for example, in the passage just after the funeral of Alkestis:

"So, to the struggle off strode Herakles,
When silence closed behind the lion-garb,
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed
The inevitable fate. And presently
In came the mourners from the funeral,
One after one, until we hoped the last
Would be Alkestis, and so end our dream.
Could they have really left Alkestis lone
I' the wayside sepulchre! Home, all save she!

And when Admetos felt that it was so,
By the stand-still: when he lifted head and face
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequence there,
And no Alkestis any more again,
Why, the whole woe billow-like broke on him."

Again, her criticism of Admetos gives at once the natural feeling of a girl who could not be satisfied with what seemed to her his selfish action, and Browning's feeling that Euripides saw its selfishness just as surely as Balaustion, despite the fact that it was in keeping, as numerous critics declare, with the customs of the age, and would not by any of his contemporaries be regarded as selfish on his part:

"So he stood sobbing: nowise insincere,
But somehow child-like, like his children, like
Childishness the world over. What was new
In this announcement that his wife must die?
What particle of pain beyond the pact
He made with his eyes wide open, long ago—
Made and was, if not glad, content to make?
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came,
He sorrowed to the height: none heard him say,
However, what would seem so pertinent,
'To keep this pact, I find surpass my power;
Rescind it, Moirai! Give me back her life,
And take the life I kept by base exchange!

Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool
Who makes a pother to escape the best
And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot!'
No, not one word of this; nor did his wife
Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon
To follow, judge so much was in his thought —
Fancy that, should the Moirai acquiesce,
He would relinquish life nor let her die.
The man was like some merchant who in storm,
Throws the freight over to redeem the ship;
No question, saving both were better still,
As it was, — why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.
So, all she seemed to notice in his speech
Was what concerned her children."

Among modern critics who take the conventional ground in regard to Admetos may be cited Churton Collins, whose opinion is, of course, weighty. He writes:

"Alcestis would be considered fortunate for having had an opportunity of displaying so conspicuously the fidelity to a wife's first and capital duty. Had Admetus prevented such a sacrifice he would have robbed Alcestis of an honor which every nobly ambitious woman in Hellas would have coveted. This is so much taken for granted by the poet that all that he lays stress on in the drama is the virtue rewarded by the return of Alcestis to life, the virtue characteristic of Admetus, the virtue of hospitality; to this duty in all the agony of his sorrow Admetus had been nobly true, and as a reward for what he had thus earned, the wife who had been equally true to woman's obligations was restored all-glorified to home and children and mutual love."

Most readers, however, will find it difficult to put themselves into the appropriate Greek frame of mind, and will sympathize with Browning's supposition that after all Euripides had transcended current ideas on the subject and deliberately intended to convey such an interpretation of the character of Admetos as Balaustion gives.

Balaustion shows her penetration again in her appreciation of Herakles. He distinguishes clearly between evil that is inherent in the nature as the selfishness of Admetos, and evil which is more or less external, growing out of conditions incident to the time rather than from any real trait of nature. Herakles' delight in the hospitality accorded him, his drinking and feasting in the interim of his labors, did not touch the genuine, large-hearted helpfulness of the demigod, who became sober the moment he learned there was sorrow in the house and need of his aid.

In her proposed version of the story, Balaustion is surely the romantic girl, who would have her hero a hero indeed and in every way the equal of his spouse. Yet if we delve below this romanticism of Balaustion we shall find the poet's own belief in the almost omniscient power of human love the basis of the relation between Admetos and Alkestis.

The soul of Alkestis in one look entered into that of Admetos; she died, but he is entirely guiltless of agreeing to her death. Alkestis herself had made the pact with Apollo to die for her husband. He, when he learns it, refuses to accept the sacrifice, and unable to persuade him that his duty to humanity demands that he accept it, Alkestis asks him to look at her. Then her soul enters his, but when she goes to Hades and demands to become a ghost, the Queen of Hades replies:

"Hence, thou deceiver! This is not to die,
If, by the very death which mocks me now,
The life, that's left behind and past my power,
Is formidably doubled — Say, there fight
Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed
With only half the weapons, and no more,
Adequate to a contest with their foes.
If one of these should fling helm, sword and shield
To fellow—shieldless, wordless, helmless late —
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave
A combatant equipped from head to heel,
Yet cry to the other side, 'Receive a friend
Who fights no longer!' 'Back, friend, to the fray!'
Would be the prompt rebuff; I echo it.
Two souls in one were formidable odds:
Admetos must not be himself and thou!

"And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look;
And lo, Alkestis was alive again,
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak?"

How unique a treatment of a classical subject this poem is, is self-evident. Not content with making a superb translation of the play, remarkable both for its literalness and for its poetic beauty, the poet has dared to present that translation indirectly through the mouth of another speaker, and to incorporate with it a running commentary of criticism in blank verse. Still more daring was it to make play and criticism an episode in a dramatic monologue in which we learn not only the story of the rescue of the shipload of Athenian sympathizers, but the story of Balaustion's love. Along with all this complexity of interest there is still room for a lifelike portrayal of Balaustion herself, one of the loveliest conceptions of womanhood in literature.

To reiterate what I have upon another occasion expressed in regard to her, she is a girl about whom the fancy loves to cling — she is so joyous, so brave, and so beautiful, and possessed of so rare a mind scintillating with wit, wisdom and critical insight, not Browning's own mind either except in so far as his sympathies were with Euripides. Her ardor for purity and perfection is perhaps peculiarly feminine. It is quite different from that of the mind tormented by the problem of evil and taking refuge in a partisanship of

evil as a force which works for good and without which the world would be a waste of insipidity. Her suggested version of the Alkestis story converts Admetos into as much of a saint as Alkestis, and makes an exquisite and soul-stirring romance of their perfect union, though it must be admitted that it would do away with all the intensity and dramatic force of the play as it is presented by Euripides. Like the angels who rejoice more over one sinner returned than over the ninety and nine that did not go astray, an artist prefers the contrast and movement of a sinning and regenerated Admetos to an Admetos more suited from the first to be the consort of Alkestis. This is the touch, however, which preserves Balaustion's feminine charm and makes her truly her own self — an ardent soul very far from being simply Browning's mouthpiece.

"Aristophanes' Apology" is a still more remarkable play in its complexity. Again, Balaustion is the speaker, and Browning has set himself the task in this monologue of relating the fall of Athens, of presenting the personality of Aristophanes, of defending Euripides, a translation of whose play, "Herakles," is included, and incidentally sketching the history of Greek comedy, all through the

mouth of the one speaker, Balaustion. Not until one has grasped the law by which the poet has accomplished this, and has moreover freshly in his mind the facts of Greek history at the time of Athen's fall, and Greek literature, especially the plays of Aristophanes and Euripides, can the poem be thoroughly enjoyed.

In the very first line the suggestion of the scene setting is given, and such suggestions occur from time to time all through the poem. It should be observed that they are never brought in for themselves alone, but are always used in connection with some mood of Balaustion's or as imagery in relation to some thought. While the reader is thus kept conscious of the background of wind and wave, as Balaustion and her husband voyage toward Rhodes, it is not until the end of the poem that we learn with a pleasant surprise that the boat on which they are sailing is the same one saved once by Balaustion when she recited Euripides' "sweetest, saddest song." Thus there is a dramatic denouement in connection with the scene setting.

Through the expression of a mood of despair on the part of Balaustion at the opening of the poem the reader is put in possession not only of the scene setting but

of the occasion of the voyage, which is the overthrow of Athens. From the mood of despair Balaustion passes to one in which she describes how she could better have borne to see Athens perish. This carries her on to a more hopeful frame of mind, in which she can foresee the spiritual influence of Athens persisting. The peace of mind ensuing upon this consideration makes it possible for her calmly to survey the events connected with its downfall, among which the picturesque episode of the dancing of the flute girls to the demolition of the walls of the Piræus is conspicuous. She then sees the vision of the immortal Athens while Sparta the victorious in arms will die. Then comes a mood in which she declares it will be better to face the grief than to brood over it, which leads to her proposing to Euthukles that they treat the fall of Athens as a tragic theme, as the poet might do, and enact it on the voyage. Then grief over the recent events takes possession of her again, and now with the feminine privilege of changing her mind, she thinks it would be better to rehearse an event which happened to herself a year ago as a prologue. Speaking of adventures causes her very naturally to drop into reminiscences about her first adventure, when she recited



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Euripides and met the man who was to become her husband.

Thus, through this perfectly natural transition from one mood to another, Balaustion leads up to the real subject-matter of the poem, Aristophanes' defence of himself, which, however, is preceded by an account of the effect of the death of Euripides upon the Athenians as witnessed by Euthukles, his death being the occasion of Aristophanes' call on Balaustion. What she calls the prologue is really the main theme of the poem, while all her talk up to this point is truly the prologue. The actual account of the fall of Athens does not come until the conclusion, and is related in comparatively few words.

What seems, then, to be the chief theme of the poem with its setting of wind and wave and bark bears somewhat the same relation to the real theme as incidental music does to a play. Upon first thoughts it may seem like a clumsy contrivance for introducing Aristophanes upon the scene, but in the end it will be perceived, I think, that it serves the artistic purpose of placing Aristophanes in proper perspective. Balaustion with her exquisitely human moods and progressive spirit forms the right complement to the decaying ideals of Aristophanes, and gives him the

proper flavor of antiquity. Instead of seeing him in the broad light of a direct dramatic presentation we see him indirectly through Balaustion's thoughts and moods, who, though permitting him to do full justice to himself, yet surrounds him all the time with the subtle influence of her sympathy for Euripides.

As the better way to follow the development of the preliminary part of the poem is by regarding every step as the outcome of a mood on the part of Balaustion, so the better way of following Aristophanes through what seems his interminable defence of himself is again by tracing the moods through which his arguments express themselves.

Aristophanes comes in half drunk to make his call on Balaustion, and his first mood is one of graciousness toward her whose beauty has impressed his artistic perceptions, but noticing her dignity and its effect in routing the chorus, he immediately begins to be on the defensive. The disappearance of his chorus, however, takes him off on a little excursion about the moves which are being made by the city to cut down the expense of dramatic performances by curtailing the chorus. In a spirit of bravado he declares that he does not care so long as he has his actors left. A coarse reference causes Balaus-

tion to turn and he changes his mood. He acknowledges he is drunk and rushes off into a defence of drunkenness in general for playwrights and for himself, which on this occasion came about on account of the supper he and his players have attended. He rattles on about the supper, telling how the merriment increased until something happened. The thought of this something changes his mood completely. Balaustion notices it, he reads her expression, and characteristically explains the change in himself as due to her fixed regard. The reader is left in suspense as to the something which happened, yet it haunts the memory, and he feels convinced that some time he is to know what it was.

Now Aristophanes bids Balaustion speak to him without fear. She does so, conveying in her welcome both her disapproval and her admiration. Aristophanes, evidently piqued, does not answer, but makes personal remarks upon the manner of her speech, asking her if she learned tragedy from *him* — Euripides. This starts him off on dreams of a new comedy in which women shall act, but he concludes that his mission is to ornament comedy as he finds it, not invent a new comedy.

This gives Balaustion a chance to ask if in his last play, later than the one Euthukles

had seen, he had smoothed this ancient club of comedy he speaks of into a more human and less brutal implement of warfare, and was it a conviction of this new method he might use in comedy which was the something that happened at the feast. Aristophanes, as usual when he is cornered, makes no direct reply, but asks if Euthukles saw his last play, to which Balaustion frankly replies that having seen the first he never cared to see the following. Aristophanes avows he can show cause why he wrote them, but glances off in a sarcastic reference to Euripides, whose art he says belongs to the closet or the cave, not to the world. He prefers to stick to the old forms of art and make Athens happy in what coarse way she desires. He then proceeds to enlarge upon what that is. Then he changes again and asks with various excursions into side issues (for example: the rise of comedy; how it is now being regarded by the government, which favors tragedy, giving him another chance for a dig at Euripides) if he is the man likely to be satisfied to be classed merely a comic poet since he wrote the "Birds?" Balaustion encourages him a little here, and, cheered up, he goes on to tell how he gave the people draught divine in "Wasps" and "Grasshoppers," and how

he praised peace by showing the kind of pleasures one may have when peace reigns — and still at every opportunity casting slurs at the tragic muse, especially Euripides.

He goes on describing his play until he touches on some of the sarcasms which make Balaustion wince.

Then he turns about and declares he loathes as much as she does the things of which he tells, but his attempts at bringing comedy up to a high level having failed, he is obliged to give the Athenians what they want, a smartened up version of the "Thesmaphoriazousai," which had failed the year before. He describes his triumph with this which was being celebrated at the supper when the something happened which is now at last described — namely, the entrance of Sophocles, who announces that he intends to commemorate the death of Euripides by having his chorus clothed in black and ungarlanded at the performance of his play next month.

This startling scene, being prepared for and not brought in until Aristophanes has done much talking, seems to throw a sudden flash of reality into the poem. Ill-natured criticism, Aristophanes shows, follows on the part of the feasters, though Aristophanes'

mood is one of sudden recognition of the value of Euripides. But when he, sobered for the time being, proposes a toast to the Tragic Muse, the feasters consider it a joke. He quickly accepts the situation, and comes off triumphant by proposing a toast to both muses.

After this Balaustion asks Aristophanes if he will commemorate Euripides with them. But his sober mood is gone. He looks about the room, sees things that belong to Euripides, and immediately begins stabbing at him. Balaustion objects, and upon the theme of respect to the dead he begins his usual invective against his rivals, but finally ends by giving respect to Euripides, him whose serenity, he declares, could never with his gibes be disturbed.

After venting this mood of animosity he begins soberly to discuss the origin of comedy. He traces its growth to the point where he found it, and enlarges on the improvements he has made, touching, as always, upon the criticisms of his opposers, and finally arriving at the chief point of difference between himself and Euripides, which he enlarges upon at great length. Here the incidental music breaks in with talk between Balaustion and Euthukles, in which the former rather tries

to excuse herself from relating her reply to Aristophanes.

However, she does give her reply, which is conducted in a more truly argumentative fashion than the defence of Aristophanes. She picks up his points and makes her points against him usually by denying the truth of what he has said. Her supreme defence is, however, the reading of the play "Herakles."

Aristophanes, touched but not convinced, finally insists that he is Athens' best friend. He is no Thamuris to be punished for seeing beyond human vision. The last characteristic touch is when Aristophanes catches up the psalterion and sings the lyric of Thamuris. Then he departs, and Balaustion rehearses the last days of Athens, with Euthukles' part in delaying the tragedy of the doomed city.

By threading one's way thus through the apology, not from the point of view of Aristophanes' arguments, but from the point of view of his moods, one experiences a tremendous sense of the personality of the man. Repetitions which are not required for the full presentation of his case take their place as natural to a man who is not only inordinately vain but is immediately swayed by every suggestion and emotion that comes to

him. Owing to his volatile temperament the argument is varied by now a bit of vivid description like that of the archon's feast when Sophocles appeared, now by some merely personal remark to Balaustion.

The criticism in this play, as in that of "Balaustion's Adventure," may be considered either as representing some phase of contemporary opinion about Aristophanes or as expressing the opinion of the poet himself. Balaustion's indignation is especially aroused by the two plays, "The Lusistrata" and the "Thesmophoriazousai," both of which she finds utterly detestable. It is interesting to compare with this entirely unfavorable criticism the feeling of such distinguished classical scholars as Gilbert Murray and J. A. Symonds. The first Murray describes as a play "full of daring indecency, it is true, but the curious thing is that Aristophanes, while professing to ridicule the women, is all through on their side. The jokes made by the superior sex at the expense of the inferior — to give them their Roman names — are seldom remarkable either for generosity or refinement, and it is our author's pleasant humor to accuse everybody of every vice he can think of at the moment. Yet with the single exception that he credits women with an inordinate fondness

for wine parties — the equivalent it would seem of afternoon tea — he makes them on the whole perceptibly more sensible and more sympathetic than his men."

Of the second play Symonds speaks with actual enthusiasm. "It has a regular plot — an intrigue and a solution — and its persons are not allegorical but real. Thus it approaches the standard of modern comedy. But the plot, though gigantic in its scale, and prodigious in its wealth of wit and satire, is farcical. The artifices by which Euripides endeavors to win Agathon to undertake his cause, the disguise of Muesilochus in female attire, the oratory of the old man against the women in the midst of their assembly, his detection, the momentary suspension of the dramatic action by his seizure of the supposed baby, his slaughter of the swaddled wine jar, his apprehension by Cleisthenes, the devices and disguises by which Euripides endeavors to extricate his father-in-law from the scrape, and the final *ruse* by which he eludes the Scythian bowmen, and carries off Muesilochus in triumph — all these form a series of highly diverting comic scenes." Again, "There is no passage in Aristophanes more amusing than the harangue of Muesilochus. The portrait, too, of Agathon in the act of compo-

sition is exquisitely comic. But the crowning sport of the 'Thesmophoriazousai' is in the last scene when Muesilochus adapts the Palamedes and the Helen of Euripides to his own forlorn condition, jumbling up the well-known verses of these tragedies with coarse-flavored, rustical remarks; and when at last Euripides, himself, acts Echo and Perseus to the Andromeda of his father-in-law, and both together mystify the policeman by their ludicrous utterance of antiphonal lamentation."

In her welcome of him, Balaustion expresses rather what she thinks he might be than what she really thinks he is. She welcomes him:

"Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow
O' the humorist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendor of wit that springs a thunder ball —
Satire — to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice, — right, as rightly quells the wrong,
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards', armory
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through.
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton, —
Though alien gauds be singed, — undesecrate."

Her attitude here is very like that of criticism in general, except that she is more or less sarcastic, meaning to imply that such Aristophanes might be but is not. Symonds, on the other hand, thinks him really what Balaustion thinks he might be.

"If," he says, "Coleridge was justified in claiming the German word Lustspiel for the so-called comedies of Shakespeare, we have a far greater right to appropriate this wide and pregnant title to the plays of Aristophanes. The brazen mask which crowns his theatre smiles indeed broadly, serenely, as if its mirth embraced the universe; but its hollow eye-sockets suggest infinite possibilities of profoundest irony. Buffoonery carried to the point of paradox, wisdom disguised as insanity, and gaiety concealing the whole sum of human disappointment, sorrow and disgust, seem ready to escape from its open but rigid lips, which are molded to a proud perpetual laughter. It is a laughter which spares neither God nor man — which climbs Olympus only to drag down the immortals to its scorn, and trails the pall of august humanity in the mire; but which, amid its mockery and blasphemy, seems everlastingly asserting, as by paradox, that reverence of the soul which bends our knees to heaven and makes us respect our brothers."

One cannot help feeling, in view of these very diverse opinions, that both are exaggerated. The enthusiasm of Symonds seems almost fanatic. Though no one of penetration can fail to see the wit and wisdom, and at times, in such lyrics as those in "The Clouds," the poetic charm of Aristophanes, the person of fastidious taste, whether a Greek girl of his own day, or a man of these latter days, must sometimes feel that his buffoonery oversteps the bounds of true wit, even when it is not shadowed by a coarseness not to be borne at the present day. When Balaustion asks him "in plain words,"

> "Have you exchanged brute blows, which teach the brute
> Man may surpass him in brutality, —
> For human fighting, or true god-like force
> Which breeds persuasion nor needs fight at all?"

Aristophanes replies that it had not been his intention to turn art's fabric upside down and invent an entirely new species of comedy. That sort of thing can be done by one who has turned his back on life, friendly faces, sympathetic cheer, as Euripides had done in his Salaminian cave.

This may be regarded, on the whole, as a good bit of defence on Aristophanes' part. It is equivalent to his saying that there was

no use in his trying to be anything for which his genius had not fitted him. This chimes in, again, with such authoritative criticism as Murray's, who declares: "The general value of his view of life, and, above all, his treatment of his opponent's alleged vices, may well be questioned. Yet admitting that he often opposed what was best in his age, or advocated it on the lowest grounds, admitting that his slanders are beyond description and that, as a rule, he only attacks the poor and the leaders of the poor, nevertheless he does it all with such exhuberant high spirits, such an air of its all being nonsense together, such insight and swiftness, such incomparable directness and charm of style, that even if some Archelaus had handed him over to Euripides to scourge, he would probably have escaped his well-earned whipping."

Much of Aristophanes' defence consists in slurring at Euripides, against whom he waxes more and more fierce as he goes on. His plays furnish numerous illustrations of his rivalry with Euripides, yet curiously enough, as critics have pointed out, Aristophanes imitates Euripides to a noteworthy extent, so much so that the dramatist Cratinus invented a word to describe the style of the two — Euripid-Aristophanize. Judging from his parodies on

Euripides, he must certainly have read and reread his plays until he knew them practically by heart.

Balaustion, as Browning has portrayed her in this poem, is the lyric girl developed into splendid womanhood. She has a large heart and a large brain, as well as imagination and strong ethical fervor. Her intense feeling at the fall of Athens, which had been the ideal to her of greatness, and her reverential love for Euripides, her charity toward Aristophanes the man, if not toward his work, show how deep and far-reaching her sympathies were. Again, her imagination flashes forth in her picturesque descriptions of the ruined Athens and her prophetic picture of the new Athens, of the spirit which will arise in its place, in her telling portraiture of Aristophanes and his entrance into her house, as well as in many another passage. Her intellect shines out in her clever management of the argument with Aristophanes, and her ethical fervor in her denunciations of the moral depravity of certain of the plays.

As to the question of whether a young Greek woman would be likely to criticise Aristophanes in this way, opinion certainly differs. History is, for the most part, silent about women. As Mahaffy says, it is only

in the dramatists and the philosophers that we can get any glimpses of the woman of the time.

Mahaffy's opinions are worth quoting as an example of the pessimism growing out of a bias in favor of a particular type of woman which he idealized in his own mind. He seems utterly incapable of appreciating the humanness of the women in the Greek dramatists, especially those in Euripides. "Sadder than the condition of the aged was that of women," he writes, "at this remarkable period. The days of the noble and high-principled Penelope, of the refined and intellectual Helen, of the innocent and spirited Nausikaa, of the gentle and patient Andromache, had passed away. Men no longer sought and respected the society of the gentler sex. Would that Euripides had even been familiar, as Homer was, with the sound of women brawling in the streets! For in these days they were confined to Asiatic silence and seclusion, while the whole life of the men, both in business and recreation, was essentially public. Just as the feverish excitement of political life nowadays prompts men to spend even their leisure in the clubs, where they meet companions of like passions and interests with themselves, so the Athenian

gentleman only came home to eat and sleep. His leisure as well as his business kept him in the market place. His wife and daughters, ignorant of philosophy and politics, were strangers to his real life, and took no interest in his pursuits.

"The results were fatal to Athenian society. The women, uninstructed, neglected, and enslaved, soon punished their oppressors with their own keen and bitter weapons, and with none keener than their vices. For, of course, all the grace and delicacy of female character disappeared. Intellectual power in women was distinctly associated with moral depravity, so that excessive ignorance and stupidity was considered the only guarantee of virtue. The qualifications for society became incompatible with the qualifications for home duties, so that the outcasts from society, as we call them, were not the immoral and the profligate but the honorable and the virtuous."

Such is the view to be gleaned from history, and in Mahaffy's opinion the literature of the time tells the same story. He goes on: "When we consult the literature of the day, we find women treated either with contemptuous ridicule in comedy, or with still more contemptuous silence in history. In tragedy

or in the social theories of the philosophers alone can we hope for a glimpse into the average character and position of Athenian women. Here at least we might have expected that the portraits drawn with such consummate skill by Homer would have been easily transferred to the Athenian stage. But to our astonishment we find the higher social feelings toward women so weak that the Athenian tragic poets seem quite unable to appreciate, or even to understand, the more delicate features in Homeric characters. They are painted so coarsely and ignorantly by Euripides that we should never recognize them but for their names. Base motives and unseemly wrangling take the place of chivalrous honor and graceful politeness.

"But the critics of the day complained that Euripides degraded the ideal character of tragedy by painting human nature as he found it: in fact as it was, and not as it ought to be. Let us turn, then, to Sophokles, who painted the most ideal women which the imagination of a refined Athenian could conceive, and consider his most celebrated characters, his Antigone and his Elektra. A calm, dispassionate survey will, I think, pronounce them harsh and masculine. They act rightly, no doubt, and even nobly, but they

do it in the most disagreeable way. Except in their external circumstances they differ in no respect from men."

Certainly, the opinion expressed of the women of Euripides is tainted by the feeling that they ought to act like English matrons and their daughters.

Quite a different impression is given by Symonds, who, in regard to some of the sentences occurring in Euripides which are uncomplimentary to women, says: "It is impossible to weigh occasional sententious sarcasms against such careful studies of heroic virtue in women as the Iphigenia, the Elektra, the Polyxena, the Alkestis."

But the complete vindication of the fact that Balaustion and Mrs. Browning and our own women of to-day are on the right side in their appreciation of Euripides as the great woman's poet of antiquity is found in the opinion of our contemporary critic, Gilbert Murray, who more than thirty years after these poems were written writes of the "wonderful women-studies by which Euripides dazzled and aggrieved his contemporaries. They called him a hater of women; and Aristophanes makes the women of Athens conspire for revenge against him. Of course he was really the reverse. He loved and

studied and expressed the women whom the Socratics ignored and Pericles advised to stay in their rooms. Crime, however, is always more striking and palpable than virtue. Heroines like Medea, Phaedra, Stheneboia, Aërope, Clytemnestra, perhaps fill the imagination more than those of the angelic or devoted type — Alcestis, who died to save her husband, Evadne and Laodamia, who could not survive theirs, and all the great list of virgin-martyrs. But the significant fact is that, like Ibsen, Euripides refuses to idealize any man, and does idealize women. There is one youth-martyr, Menoikeus in the 'Phænissae,' but his martyrdom is a masculine, businesslike performance — he gets rid of his prosaic father by a pretext about traveling money without that shimmer of loveliness that hangs over the virgins."

Where then did Euripides find these splendid women of force and character? It seems quite impossible that he could have evolved them out of his own inner consciousness. He must have known women who served at least, in part, as models. Besides, there was undoubtedly a new woman movement in the air or Plato in his "Republic" would not have suggested a plan for educating men and women alike. The free women of Athens

are known in some cases to have attained a high degree of culture. Aspasia, who bebecame the wife of Pericles, is a shining example. There was Sappho, also, with her school of poetry attended by girls in Lesbos.

Taking all these facts into consideration, it would seem that Browning was sufficiently justified in drawing such a woman as Balaustion, and that a woman of her penetrating intellect and ardor of spirit would love Euripides, and dislike Aristophanes, seems absolutely certain.

Therefore, if the historical attitude is taken toward Balaustion and her criticism and appreciation, it can be on the whole accepted as reflecting what would probably be the feeling of an ardent woman-follower of Euripides in his own day.

But, on the other hand, if the criticism be taken as Browning's own, it is open to question whether it is partisan rather than entirely broad-minded. Take the consensus of opinion of modern critics and we find them all agreed in regard to the genius of Aristophanes, though admitting that his coarseness must, at times, detract from their enjoyment of him.

There is much truth in Symonds' criticism of the poem. He says of it: "As a sophist and

a rhetorician of poetry, Mr. Browning proves himself unrivaled, and takes rank with the best writers of historical romances. Yet students may fairly accuse him of some special pleading in favor of his friends and against his foes. It is true that Aristophanes did not bring back again the golden days of Greece; true that his comedy revealed a corruption latent in Athenian life. But neither was Euripides in any sense a savior. Impartiality regards them both as equally destructive: Aristophanes, because he indulged animalism and praised ignorance in an age which ought to have outgrown both; Euripides, because he criticised the whole fabric of Greek thought and feeling in an age which had not yet distinguished between analysis and skepticism.

"What has just been said about Mr. Browning's special pleading indicates the chief fault to be found with his poem. The point of view is modern. The situation is strained. Aristophanes becomes the scapegoat of Athenian sins, while Euripides shines forth a saint as well as a sage. Balaustion, for her part, beautiful as her conception truly is, takes up a position which even Plato could not have assumed. Into her mouth Mr. Browning has put the views of the most searching and most sympathetic modern

analyst. She judges Euripides not as he appeared to his own Greeks, but as he strikes the warmest of his admirers, who compare his work with that of all the poets who have ever lived."

It would seem that Mr. Symonds, himself, does some special pleading here. As we have seen, Euripides, though not a favorite in Athens, did have warm admirers in his own day; consequently there is nothing out of the way in portraying one of his contemporaries as an admirer. Furthermore, Balaustion does not represent him as a savior of his age. She sees only too clearly that in the narrow sense of convincing his age he has not been a success. What is her vision of the spiritual Athens which is to arise but a confession of this fact! Nor is it entirely improbable that she might be prophetic of a time when Euripides will be recognized as the true power. Any disciple of a poet ahead of his time perceives these things. One should be careful in judging of the poem as good modern criticism not to be entirely guided by the opinions of Balaustion. It should never be forgotten that it is a dramatic poem in which Aristophanes is allowed to speak for himself at great length, and whatever can be accepted as good argument for himself upon

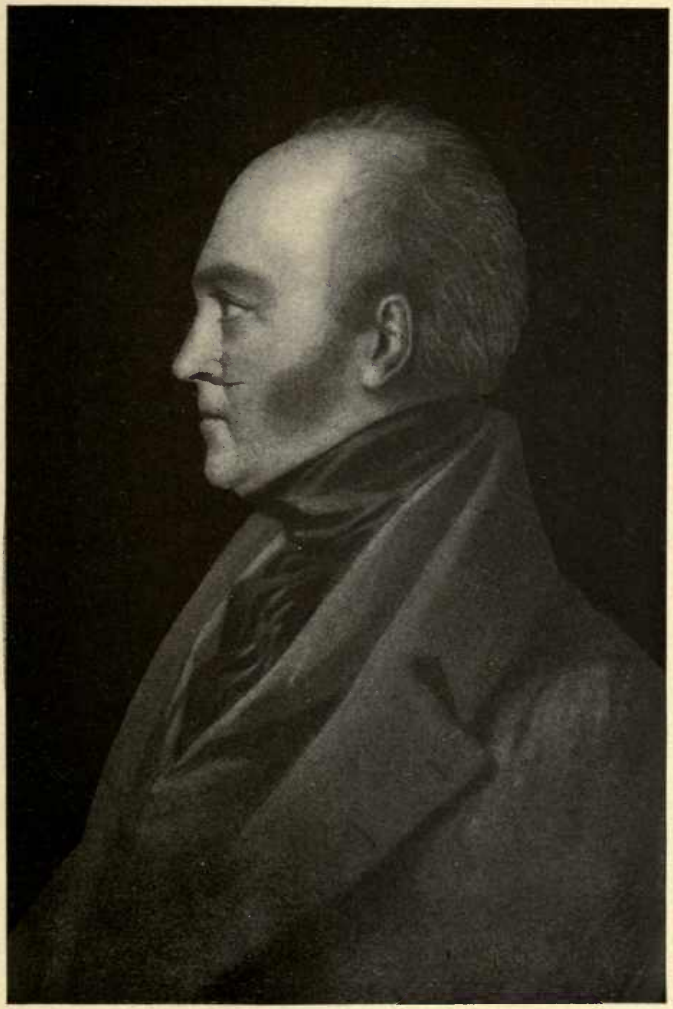
his own ground should be set over against the sweeping strictures of Balaustion. Indeed it may turn out that Browning has, after all, said for him the most exculpatory word of any critic, for he has so presented his case as to show that he considers him the outcome of the undeveloped phase of morals then existing for which he is hardly responsible because the higher light has not yet broken in upon him. This is evidenced especially in the strange combination in him of a frank belief in a life of the senses which goes along with a puritanical reverence for the gods, and a hatred of anything that falls within his own definition of vice.

To sum up, if I may again be forgiven for re-expressing an opinion elsewhere printed, which states as clearly as I am able to do my conviction of where the play stands as criticism, like all dramatic work, this poem aims to present the actual spirit of the time in which the actors moved upon the stage of life, and to reproduce something of their mental and emotional natures. Any criticism of the poets who figure in the poem, or of the larger question of the quarrel between tragedy and comedy, should be deduced indirectly, as implied in the sympathetic presentation of both sides, not based exclusively upon direct

expressions of opinion on either side. So regarded it would seem that Browning was able to appreciate the genius of Aristophanes as well as that of Euripides, but that he considered Aristophanes to have value chiefly in relation to his age, as the artistic mouthpiece of its long-established usages, while Euripides had caught the breath of the future, and was the mirror of the prophetic impulses of his age rather than of its dominant civilization.

It is not improbable that Landor's fascinating portrayal of the brilliant Aspasia may have had some influence upon Browning's conception of Balaustion, upon the intellectual side at least. Alcibiades says that many people think her language as pure and elegant as Pericles, and Pericles says she was never seen out of temper or forgetful of what argument to urge first and most forcibly. When all is said, however, it may be that the "halo irised around" Balaustion's head was due, more than to any one else, to the influence of the memory of Mrs. Browning, of whom she is made to say with a sublime disregard of its anachronism:

> "I know the poetess who graved in gold,
> Among her glories that shall never fade,
> This style and title for Euripides,
> *The Human with his droppings of warm tears.*"



WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

After such a study of Greek life as this, wherein every available incident in history, every episode in the plays of Aristophanes bearing on the subject, every contemporary allusion are all woven together with such consummate skill that the very soul and body of the time is imaged forth, the classical poems of the other great names of the century seem almost like child's play. Landor's poems on Greek subjects sound like imitations in inferior material of antiquity. Arnold's are even duller. Swinburne tells his Greek tales in an endless flow of rhythmical, musical verse, which occasionally rises into the realm of having something to say. Morris tells his at equal length in a manner suggestive of Chaucer without Chaucer's snap, but where among them all is there such a bit of stinging life as in "Pheidippedes" or "Echetlos?"

Tennyson has, it is true, written some altogether exquisite verse, upon classical themes, and in every case the poems are not descriptive nor dramatic, but are dramatic soliloquies, thus approaching in form Browning's dramatic idyls. One of the most beautiful of these is "Œnone." There we have a mere tradition enlarged upon and the feelings of Œnone upon the desertion of Paris expressed with a richness of emotional fervor

in a setting of appropriate nature imagery which carries us back to the idyls of Theocritus. "Ulysses," again gives the psychology of a wanderer who has become so habituated to adventures that he is quite incapable of settling down with Penelope for the remainder of his life. One cannot quite forgive the poet for calling the ever youthful and beautiful Penelope, whose hand was sought by so many suitors, and who, although twenty years had passed, might still be quite young, an "aged wife." It has always seemed to the writer like a wholly unnecessary stab at a very beautiful story, and the poem would have been just as effective if Ulysses' hunger for lands beyond the sun had not been coupled with any scorn of Penelope, but with a feeling of pain that again Fate must take him away from her. Aside from this note of bad taste — bad, because it shadows a picture of faithfulness, cherished as an almost universal possession of humanity — the poem is fine. There is also, though not Greek, the remarkable study of Lucretius going mad from the effects of his wife's love philter, in which the most fascinating glimpses of his philosophy of atoms are caught amid his maniacal wanderings, and, last, the very beautiful Demeter and Persephone.

These are as unique in their way as Browning's Greek poems are in theirs, standing quite apart from such work as Morris', or Swinburne's, not only because of their haunting music, which even Swinburne cannot equal, but because of a deeper vein of thought running through them. As far as thought is concerned, however, all pale in significance the moment they are placed in juxtaposition with any of Browning's classical productions.

Not the least interesting of Browning's classical poems is "Ixion." In his treatment of the myth of Ixion he proves himself a true child of the Greeks, not that he makes any slavish attempt to reproduce a Greek atmosphere as it existed in the lifetime of Greek poetry, but he exercises that prerogative which the Greek poets always claimed, of interpreting a myth to suit their own ends.

It has become a sort of critical axiom to compare Browning's "Ixion" with the "Prometheus" of literature. This is one of those catching analogies which lay hold upon the mind, and cannot be shaken off again without considerable difficulty. Mr. Arthur Symons first spoke of the resemblance; and almost every other critic with the exception of Mr. Nettleship has dwelt mainly upon that

aspect of the poem which bears out the comparison. But why, it might very well be asked, did Browning, if he intended to make another Prometheus, choose Ixion for his theme? And the answer is evident, because in the story of Ixion he found some quality different from any which existed in the story of Prometheus, and which was especially suited to the end he had in view.

The kernel of the myth of Prometheus as developed by Æschylus is proud, unflinching suffering of punishment, inflicted, not by a god justly angry for sin against himself, but by a god sternly mindful of his own prerogatives, whose only right is might, and jealous of any interference in behalf of the race which he detested — the race of man. Thus Prometheus stands out as a hero in Greek mythology, a mediator between man and the blind anger of a god of unconditional power; and Prometheus, with an equally blind belief in Fate, accepts while he defies the punishment inflicted by Zeus. He tacitly acknowledges the right of Zeus to punish him, since he confesses his deeds to be sins, but, nevertheless, he would do exactly the same thing over again:

> "By my choice, my choice
> I freely sinned — I will confess my sin —
> And helping mortals found mine own despair."

On the other hand, Ixion never appears in classic lore as a hero. He has been called the "Cain" of Greece, because he was the first, as Pindar says, "to introduce to mortal men the murder of kin not unaccompanied by cunning." Zeus appears, however, to have shown more leniency to him for the crime of killing his father-in-law than he ever did to Prometheus, as he not only purified him from murder, but invited him to a seat among the gods. But to quote Pindar again, "he found his prosperity too great to bear, when with infatuate mind he became enamored of Hera. . . . Thus his conceit drave him to an act of enormous folly, but the man soon suffered his deserts, and received an exquisite torture." Ixion, then, in direct contrast to Prometheus, stands forth an embodiment of the most detestable of sins, perpetrated simply for personal ends. To depict such a man as this in an attitude of defiance, and yet to justify his defiance, is a far more difficult problem than to justify the already admired heroism of Prometheus. It is entirely characteristic of Browning that he should choose perhaps the most unprincipled character in the whole range of Greek mythology as his hero. He is not content, like Emerson, with simply telling us that "in the

mud and scum of things there alway, alway something sings"; his aim is ever to bring us face to face with reality, and to open our ears that we may hear for ourselves this universal song. In fine, Browning chose Ixion and not another, because he wanted above all things an unquestioned sinner; and the task he set himself was to show the use of sin and at the same time exonerate the sinner from the eternal consequences of his act.

So mystical is the language of the poem that it is extremely difficult to trace behind it the subtle reasoning. Mr. Nettleship has given by far the best exposition of the poem, though even he does not seize all its suggestiveness.

Ixion, the sinner, suffering eternal torment, questions the justice of such torment. The first very important conclusion to which he comes, and it is one entirely in accord with science, is that sin is an aberration of sense, merely the result of external conditions in which the soul of man has no active part. The soul simply dreams, but once fully awakened, it would free itself from this bondage of sense if it were allowed to do so. Ixion argues that it is Zeus that hath made him and not he himself, and if he has sinned it is

through the bodily senses which Zeus has conferred upon him, and if he were the friendly and all-powerful god which he claimed himself to be and which Ixion believed he was, why did he allow these distractions of sense to lead him (Ixion) into sin which could only be expiated by eternal punishment? Without body there would have been nothing to obstruct his soul's rush upon the real; and with one touch of pitying power Zeus might have dispersed "this film-work, eye's and ear's." It is entirely the fault of Zeus that he had sinned; and having done so will external torture make him repent any more who has repented already? This is the old, old problem that has taxed the brains of many a philosopher and the faith of many a theologian — the reconcilement of the existence of evil with an omnipotent God. Then follows a comparison between the actions of Zeus, a god, and of Ixion, the human king; and Ixion declares could he have known all, as Zeus does, he would have warded off evil from his subjects, would have seen that they were trained aright from the first — in fact, would not have allowed evil to exist, or failing this, could he have seen the heart of the criminals and realized how they repented he would have given them a chance to retrieve their past.

Ixion now realizes that his human ideal is higher than that of Zeus. He had imagined him possessed of human qualities, and finds his qualities are less than human. What must be the inevitable result of arriving at such a conclusion? It means the dethronement of the god, and either a lapse into hopeless atheism or the recognition that the conception formed of the god was that of the human mind at an earlier stage of understanding. This conception becomes crystallized into an anthropomorphic god; but the mind of man goes onward on its way to higher heights, and lo! there comes a day when the god-ideal of the past is lower than the human ideal of the present. It is such a crisis as this that Ixion has arrived at, and his faith is equal to the strain. Since Zeus is man's own mind-made god, Ixion's tortures must be the natural consequences of his sin, and not the arbitrary punishment of a god; and what is Ixion's sin as Browning has interpreted the myth?

The sin is that of arrogance. Ixion, a mere man, strives to be on an equality with gods. In Lucian's dialogue between Hera and Zeus the stress is laid upon the arrogance of Ixion. Jupiter declares that Ixion shall pay the "penalty not of his love — for that surely is not so dreadful a crime — but of his loud

boasting." Browning raises the sin into a rarer atmosphere than that of the Greek or Latin. Zeus and Hera may be taken to represent the attributes of power and love as conceived by man in Divinity; and Ixion, symbolic of man, arrogantly supposes that he is capable of putting himself on an equality with Divinity by conceiving the entire nature of Divinity, that out of his finite mind he can construct the absolute god, and this is the sin, or, better, the aberration of sense, which results in the crystallization of his former inadequate conceptions into an anthropomorphic god, and causes his own downfall. Ixion, now fully aroused to the fact that the god he has been defying is but his own miserable conception of God, realizes that the suffering caused by this conception of God is the very means through which man struggles toward higher ideals: through evil he is brought to a recognition of the good; from his agony is bred the rainbow of hope, which ever shines above him glorified by the light from a Purity far beyond, all-unobstructed. Successive conceptions of God must sink; but man, however misled by them, must finally burst through the obstructions of sense, freeing his spirit to aspire forever toward the light.

"Ixion," then, is not merely an argument

against eternal punishment, nor a picture of heroic suffering, though he who will may draw these lessons from it, but it is a tremendous symbol of the spiritual development of man. Pure in its essence, the spirit learns through the obstructions of sense to yearn forever for higher attainment, and this constitutes the especial blessedness of man as contrasted with Zeus. He, like the Pythagorean Father of Number, is the conditioned one; but man is privileged through all æons of time to break through conditions, and thus Ixion, triumphant, exclaims:

> "Where light, where light is, aspiring
> Thither I rise, whilst thou — Zeus, keep the godship and sink."

In these poems, as in other phases of his work, Browning runs the gamut of life, of art, and of thought. He has set a new standard in regard to the handling of classic material, one which should open the field of classic lore afresh to future poets. Instead of trying to ape in more or less ineffectual imitations the style and thought of the great masters of antiquity, or simply use their mythology as a well-spring of romance to be clothed in whatever vagaries of style the individual poet might be able to invent, the

aim of the future poet should be to reconstruct the life and thought of that wonderful civilization. One playwright, at least, has made a step in the right direction. I refer to Gilbert Murray, whose classical scholarship has thrown so much light upon the vexed questions of Browning's attitude toward Euripides, and who, in his "Andromache," has written a play, not in classical, but in modern form, which seems to bring us more into touch with the life of Homer's day than even Homer himself.

VII

PROPHETIC VISIONS

THE division between centuries, though it be an arbitrary one, does actually appear to mark fairly definite steps in human development, and already there are indications that the twentieth century is taking on a character quite distinct from that of the nineteenth. It looks now as if it were to be the century of the realization of mankind's wildest dreams in the past. Air navigation, the elixir of life, perpetual motion, are some of them. About the first no one can now have much skepticism, for if airships are not as yet common objects of the everyday sky, they, at least, occupy a large share of attention in the magazines, while the aviator, a being who did not exist in the last century, is now the hero of the hour.

With regard to the second, though no sparkling elixir distilled from some rare flower, such as that Septimius Felton sought in Hawthorne's tale, has been discovered, the great scientist Metchnikoff has brought to

light a preserver of youth more in keeping with the science of the day—namely, a microbe, possessing power to destroy the poison that produces age. Whether perpetual youth is to lead to immortality in the flesh will probably be a question for other centuries to discuss, though if Metchnikoff is right there is no reason why we should not retain our youthfulness all our lives in this century. Add to this, machinery run by the perpetual energy of radium — a possibility, if radium can ever be obtained in sufficient quantities to supply the needed power to keep modern civilization on its ceaseless "go"—and we may picture to ourselves, before the end of the twentieth century, youths of ninety starting forth on voyages of thirty years in radium ships, which, like the fairy watch of the Princess Rossetta, will never go wrong and will never need to be wound up, metaphorically speaking. It would almost seem as if some method of enlarging the earth, or of arranging voyages to the moon and Mars, would be necessary in order to give the new radium machinery sufficient scope for its activities. However, at present it seems unlikely that it will ever be possible to produce more than half an ounce of radium a year. As it would take a ton to run one ship for thirty years, and

the expense would be something almost incalculable, it is a dream only to be realized by the inventing of methods by which the feeble radio-activity known to exist in many other substances can be utilized. These methods have not yet been invented, but it is a good deal that they have been thought of, for what man thinks of he generally seems to have the indomitable energy to accomplish.

How such inventions as these, even if very far from attaining success, may affect the social and thought ideals of the century it is impossible to say. The automobile is said to have brought about a change, not altogether beneficial, to the intellectual and artistic growth of society to-day. It has taken such powerful possession of the minds of humanity that homes have been mortgaged, music and books and pictures have been sacrificed, in order that all the money procurable could be put into the machines and their running. You hear complaints against the automobile from writers, musicians, and artists. The only thing that really has a good sale is the automobile. What effect rushing about so constantly at high speed in the open air is to have on the brain-power is another interesting problem. Perhaps it is this growing subjec-

tive delight in motion which is causing the development of an artistic taste dependent upon motion as its chief element. Motion pictures and dancing appeal to the public with such insistence that plays will not hold successfully without an almost exaggerated attention to action and dancing, which, whenever it is at all possible, make a part of the "show."

The pictures of the new school of painters, the futurists, also reveal the craze for motion. They try to put into their pictures the successive and decidedly blurred impressions, from the illustrations I have seen, of scenes in motion, with a result that is certainly startling and interesting, but which it is difficult to believe is beautiful. One has a horrible suspicion that all this emphasis upon motion in art is a running to seed of the art which appeals to the eye and with a psychological content derived principally from sensation. Perhaps in some other century, fatuous humanity will like to listen to operas or to plays in a pitch-dark theatre. This will represent the going to seed of the art which appeals to the ear, and a psychological content derived principally from sentiment.

While movement seems to be the keynote of the century thus far, in its everyday life

and in its art manifestation, very interesting developments are taking place in scientific theories and in philosophy, as well as in the world of education and sociology.

In relation to Browning and the other chief poets of the nineteenth century, the only aspects of interest are in the region of thought and social ideals.

With the exception of Tennyson, no other of the chief poets of the century need be considered in this connection with Browning, because, as we have seen in a previous chapter, they reflected on the whole the prevalent disbelief and doubt of the century which came with the revelations of science. Many people have regarded Tennyson as the chief prophet of the century. He seems, however, to the present writer to have held an attitude which reflected the general tone of religious aspiration in the century, rather than one which struck a new note indicating the direction in which future religious aspiration might turn.

The conflict in his mind is between doubt and belief. To doubt he has often given the most poignant expression, as in his poem called "Despair." The story is of a man and his wife who have lost all religious faith through the reading of scientific books:

"Have I crazed myself over their horrible infidel writings?
O, yes,
For these are the new dark ages, you see, of the popular press,
When the bat comes out of his cave, and the owls are whooping at noon,
And doubt is the lord of the dunghill, and crows to the sun and the moon,
Till the sun and the moon of our science are both of them turned into blood.
And hope will have broken her heart, running after a shadow of good;
For their knowing and know-nothing books are scatter'd from hand to hand —
We have knelt in your know-all chapel, too, looking over the sand."

If the effect of science was bad upon this weak-minded pair, the effect of religion as it had been taught them was no better. The absolute hopelessness of a blasted faith in all things reaches its climax in the following stanzas:

"And the suns of the limitless universe sparkled and shone in the sky,
Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew that their light was a lie —
Bright as with deathless hope — but, however they sparkled and shone,
The dark little worlds running round them were worlds of woe like our own —
No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth below,
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe.

"See, we were nursed in the drear nightfold of your fatalist creed,
And we turn'd to the growing dawn, we had hoped for a dawn indeed,
When the light of a sun that was coming would scatter the ghosts of the past.
And the cramping creeds that had madden'd the peoples would vanish at last,
And we broke away from the Christ, our human brother and friend,
For He spoke, or it seemed that He spoke, of a hell without help, without end.

"Hoped for a dawn, and it came, but the promise had faded away;
We had passed from a cheerless night to the glare of a drearier day;
He is only a cloud and a smoke who was once a pillar of fire,
The guess of a worm in the dust and the shadow of its desire—
Of a worm as it writhes in a world of the weak trodden down by the strong,
Of a dying worm in a world, all massacre, murder and wrong."

There are many hopeful passages in Tennyson to offset such deep pessimism as is expressed in this one, which, moreover, being a dramatic utterance it must be remembered, does not reflect any settled conviction on the poet's part, though it shows him liable to moods of the most extreme doubt. In "The Ancient Sage" the agnostic spirit of the century is fully described, but instead of leading to a mood of despair, the mood is one

of clinging to faith in the face of all doubt. The sage speaking, says:

"Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one.
Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no,
Nor yet that thou art mortal — nay, my son,
Thou canst not prove that I who speak with thee,
Are not thyself in converse with thyself,
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven. Wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!
She reels not in the storm of warring words,
She brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No.'
She sees the best that glimmers thro' the worst,
She feels the sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain where they wail'd Mirage!"

There is nothing here more reassuring than a statement made by the sage, based upon no argument, nor revelation, nor intuition — nothing but the utilitarian doctrine that it will be wiser to cling to Faith beyond Faith! This is a sample of the sort of assurance in the reality of God and of immortality which Tennyson was in the habit of giving. In the

poem called "Vastness" he presents with genuine power a pessimistic view of humanity and civilization in all its various phases — all of no use, neither the good any more than the bad, "if we all of us end but in being our own corpse-coffins at last?" The effect of the dismal atmosphere of the poem as a whole is supposed to be dissipated by the last stanza:

> "Peace, let it be! for I loved him, and love him forever:
> the dead are not dead but alive."

The conviction here of immortality through personal love is born of the feeling that his friend whom he has loved must live forever. The note of "In Memoriam" is sounded again. Tennyson's philosophy, in a nutshell, seems to be that doubts are not so much overcome as quieted by a struggling faith in the truths of religion, of which the chief assurance lies in the thought of personal love. Not as in Browning, that human love, because of its beauty and ecstasy, is a symbol of divine love, but because of its wish to be reunited to the one beloved is an earnest of continued existence. While Tennyson's poetry is saturated with allusions to the science of the century, it seems to be ever the dark side of the doctrine of evolution that is dwelt upon

by him, while his religion is held to in spite of the truths of science, not because the truths of science have given him in any way a new revelation of beauty.

Much more emphasis has been laid upon Tennyson's importance as a prophet in religious matters than seems to the present writer warranted. He did not even keep pace with the thought of the century, though his poetry undoubtedly reflected the liberalized theology of the earlier years of the second half of the century. As Joseph Jacobs says, "In Memoriam" has been to the Broad Church Movement what the "Christian Year" has been to the High Church. But where is the Broad Church now? Tennyson was, on the whole, adverse to evolution, which has been almost an instinct in English speculation for the last quarter of a century. So far as he was the voice of his age in speculative matters, he only represented the thought of the "sixties."

What vision Tennyson did have came not through intuition or the higher reason, but through his psychic power of self-hypnotism. In "The Ancient Sage" is a passage describing the sort of trance into which he could evidently cause himself to fall:

"For more than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself
The word that is the symbol of myself,
The mortal limit of the self was loosed,
And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into Heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine — and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self,
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were sun to spark — unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow world."

Such trances have been of common occurrence in the religious life of the world, as Professor James has shown so exhaustively in his great book, "Varieties of Religious Experience." And in that book, too, it is maintained, against the scientific conclusions, that such ecstasies "signify nothing but suggested and imitated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition, and a corporal one of degeneration and hysteria," that mystical states have an actual value as revelations of the truth. After passing in review many examples of ecstasy and trance, from the occasional experiences of the poets to the constant experiences of the mediæval mystics and the Hindu Yogis, he finally comes to the interesting conclusion that:

"This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the absolute is the great mystic achievement.

In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our one-ness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity — which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land."

The witness given religion in Tennyson's mystical trances is then his most valuable contribution to the speculative thought of the century, and in a sense is prophetic of the twentieth century, because in this century revelations attained in this way have been given a credence long denied them except in the case of the uneducated and super-emotional, by a man of the sound scholarship and good judgment of Professor James.

How fully Browning was a representative of the thought of this time, combining as he did an intuitional with a scientific outlook has already been shown. Evolution means for him the progress toward the infinite, and is full of beauty and promise. The failures in nature and life which fill Tennyson with despair furnish to Browning's mind a proof of the existence of the absolute, or a somewhere beyond, where things will be

righted. Observation shows him everywhere in the universe the existence of power and mystery. The mystery is either that of the incomprehensibleness of causes, or is emphasized in the existence of evil. The first leads to awe and wonder, and is a constant spur to mankind to seek further knowledge, but the poet insists that the knowledge so accumulated is not actual gain, but only a means to gain in so far as it keeps bringing home to the human mind the fact of its own inadequacy in the discovery of truth. The existence of evil leads to the constant effort to overcome it, and to sympathy and pity, and as the failure of knowledge proves a future of truth to be won, so the failure of mankind to attain perfection in moral action proves a future of goodness to be realized. All this may be found either explicitly or implied in the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer, whose fundamental principles, despite the fire of criticism to which he has been subjected from all sides — science, religion, metaphysics, each of which felt it could not claim him exclusively as its own, yet resenting his inclusion of the other two — are now, in the first decade of the twentieth century, receiving the fullest recognition by such masters of the history of nineteenth-century

thought as Theodore Merz and Émile Boutroux.

People often forget that while Spencer spent his life upon the knowledge or scientific side of human experience, he frequently asserted that there was in the human consciousness an intuition of the absolute which was the only certain knowledge possessed by man. Here again Browning was at one with Spencer. Discussing the problem of a future life in "La Saisiaz," he declares that God and the soul are the only facts of which he is absolutely certain:

"I have questioned and am answered. Question, answer presuppose
Two points: that the thing itself which questions, answers — *is*, it knows;
As it also knows the thing perceived outside itself — a force
Actual ere its own beginning, operative through its course,
Unaffected by its end — that this thing likewise needs must be;
Call this — God, then, call that — soul, and both — the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? That they o'erpass my power of proving, proves them such."

To this scientific and metaphysical side Browning adds, as has also already been pointed out, a mystical side based upon feeling. His revelations of divinity do not

come by means of self-induced trances, as Tennyson's seem to have come, but through the mystery of feeling. This mystical state seems to have been his habitual one, if we may judge by its prominence in his poetry. He occasionally descends to the realm of reason, as he has in "La Saisiaz," but the true plane of his existence is up among the exaltations of aspiration and love. His cosmic sense is a sense of God as Love, and is the quality most characteristic of the man. It is like, though perhaps not identical with, the mysticism of Whitman, which seems to have been an habitual state. He writes: "There is, apart from mere intellect, in the make-up of every superior human identity, a wondrous something that realizes without argument, frequently without what is called education (though I think it the goal and apex of all education deserving the name), an intuition of the absolute balance, in time and space, of the whole of this multifariousness, this revel of fools, and incredible make-believe and general unsettledness we call *the world;* a soul-sight of that divine clue and unseen thread which holds the whole congeries of things, all history and time, and all events, however trivial, however momentous, like a leashed dog in the hand of the hunter."

This mystic mood of Browning's which underlies his whole work — even a work like "The Ring and the Book," where evil in various forms is rampant and seems for the time being to conquer — is nowhere more fully, and at the same time more co cisely, expressed than in his poem "Reverie," one of his last, which ends with a full revelation of this mystical feeling, from which the less inspired reasoning of "La Saisiaz" is a descent:

"Even as the world its life,
So have I lived my own —
Power seen with Love at strife,
That sure, this dimly shown —
Good rare and evil rife

"Whereof the effect be — faith
That, some far day, were found
Ripeness in things now rathe,
Wrong righted, each chain unbound,
Renewal born out of scathe.

"Why faith — but to lift the load,
To leaven the lump, where lies
Mind prostrate through knowledge owed
To the loveless Power it tries
To withstand, how vain! In flowed

"Ever resistless fact:
No more than the passive clay
Disputes the potter's act,
Could the whelmed mind disobey
Knowledge the cataract.

"But, perfect in every part,
Has the potter's moulded shape,
Leap of man's quickened heart,
Throe of his thought's escape,
Stings of his soul which dart,

"Through the barrier of flesh, till keen
She climbs from the calm and clear,
Through turbidity all between
From the known to the unknown here,
Heaven's 'Shall be' from Earth's 'Has been'?

"Then life is — to wake not sleep,
Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
Things perfected more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep,

"Where, amid what strifes and storms
May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love — transports, transforms,
Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms!

"I have faith such end shall be:
From the first, Power was — I knew.
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

"When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth
And Power comes full in play."

Browning has, far more than Tennyson, put religious speculation upon a basis where it may stand irrespective of a belief in the revelations of historical Christianity. For the central doctrine of Christianity he had so profound a reverence that he recurs to it again and again in his poetry, and at times his feeling seems to carry him to the verge of orthodox belief. So near does he come to it that many religious critics have been convinced that he might be claimed as a Christian in the orthodox sense of the word.

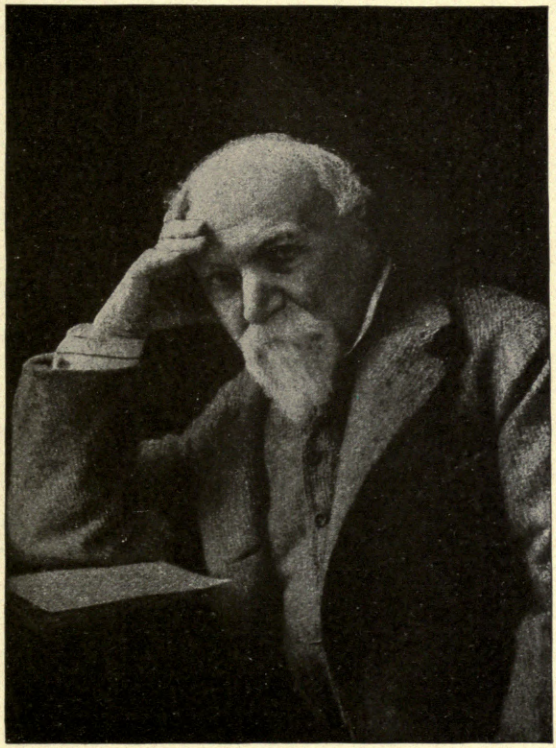
A more careful reading, however, of such poems as "The Death in the Desert," and "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," upon which rest principally the claim of the poet's orthodoxy, will reveal that no certain assertion of a belief in supernaturalism is made, even though the poems are dramatic and it might be made without necessarily expressing the feeling of the poet. What Browning felt was that in historical Christianity the highest symbol of divine love had been reached. Though he may at times have had moods in which he would fain have believed true an ideal which held for him great beauty, his worth for his age was in saving religion, *not* upon a basis of faith, but upon the ground of logical arguments deduced from the failure

of knowledge, of his personal intuition of God and his mystical vision in regard to the nature of God.

So complete a synthesis is this that only in the present century is its full purport likely to be realized. The thought of the century is showing everywhere a strong reaction away from materialism and toward religious thought.

Even in the latest stronghold of science, psychology, as we have already seen, there is no formula which will explain the existence of individuality. While the scientists themselves plod on, often quite unconscious that they are not dealing with ultimates, the thinkers are no longer satisfied with a philosophy of materialism, and once more it is being recognized that the province of philosophy is to give us God, the soul and immortality.

It is especially interesting in this connection to observe that Germany, the land of destructive biblical criticism, which Browning before the middle of the century handled with the consummate skill characteristic of him, by accepting its historical conclusions while conserving the spirit of Christianity, has now in the person of Professor Rudolf Eucken done an almost similar thing. Like Brown-



Browning at 77 (1889)

ing, he is a strong individualist and believes that the development of the soul is the one thing of supreme moment. "There is a spontaneous springing up of the individual spiritual life," he writes, "only within the soul of the individual. All social and all historical life that does not unceasingly draw from this source falls irrecoverably into a state of stagnation and desolation. The individual can never be reduced to the position of a mere member of society, of a church, of a state; notwithstanding all external subordination, he must assert an inner superiority; each spiritual individual is more than the whole external world."

He calls his system "activism," which merely seems to be another way of saying that the soul-life is one of aspiration toward moral ideals and the will to carry them out. Such a life, he thinks, demands a new world and a new character in man, and is entirely at variance with nature. "Our whole life is an indefatigable seeking and pressing forward. In self-consciousness the framework is given which has to be filled; in it we have acquired only the basis upon which the superstructure has to be raised. We have to find experience in life itself to reveal something new, to develop life, to increase its range and depth.

The endeavor to advance in spirituality, to win through struggle, is the soul of the life of the individual and the work of universal history." Readers of Browning will certainly not feel that there is anything new in this.

In so far, however, as he finds the spiritual life at variance with nature he parts company with Browning, showing himself to be under the influence of the dualism of the past which regarded matter and spirit as antagonistic. In Browning's view, matter and spirit are the two aspects of God, in the one, power being manifested; in the other, love.

It follows naturally from this, that Eucken does not think of evil as a means by which good is developed. He prefers to regard it as unexplained, and forever with us to be overcome. Its reduction to a means of realizing the good leads, he thinks, "to a weakening which threatens to transform the mighty world-struggle into an artistic arrangement of things and into an effeminate play, and which takes away that bitterness from evil without which there is no strenuousness in the struggle and no vitality in life. Thus it remains true that religion does not so much explain as presuppose evil." An attempt to explain evil, he says, belongs to speculation

rather than to religion. That he has an inkling of the region to which speculation might lead him is shown when it is realized, that upon his explanation, as one critic of him has said, it might be possible to find "some reconciliation in the fact that this world with its negations had awakened the spiritual life to its absolute affirmation, which could, therefore, not be in absolute opposition."

In leaving aside speculation and confining himself to what he considers the religious aspects of life, he no doubt strengthens himself as a leader of those whose speculative powers have not yet been developed, or who can put one side of the mind to sleep and accept with the other half-truths. The more developed mind, however, will prefer Browning's greater inclusiveness. To possess a complete view of life, man must live his own life as a human being struggling to overcome the evil, at the same time keeping in mind the fact that evil is in a sense the raw material provided by God, or the Absolute, or whatever name one chooses to give to the all-powerful and all-loving, from which the active soul of man is to derive a richness of beauty and harmony of development not otherwise possible. Eucken's attitude toward Jesus is summed up in a way which reminds one strongly of the position

taken in the comment made at the end of "The Death in the Desert." He writes: "The position of the believer in the universal Christian Church is grounded upon a relation to God whose uniqueness emerges from the essential divinity of Jesus; only on this supposition can the personality of Christ stand as the unconditional Lord and Master to whom the ages must do homage. And while the person of Jesus retains a wonderful majesty apart from dogma, its greatness is confined to the realm of humanity, and whatever of new and divine life it brings to us must be potential and capable of realization in us all. We therefore see no more in this figure the normative and universally valid type of all human life, but merely an incomparable individuality which cannot be directly imitated. At any rate the figure of Jesus, thus understood in all its height and pure humanity, can no longer be an object of faith and divine honor. All attempts to take shelter in a mediating position are shattered against a relentless either — or. Between man and God there is no intermediate form of being for us, for we cannot sink back into the ancient cult of heroes. If Jesus, therefore, is not God, if Christ is not the second person in the Trinity, then he is a

man; not a man like any average man among ourselves, but still man. We can therefore honor him as a leader, a hero, a martyr, but we cannot directly bind ourselves to him or root ourselves in him; we cannot submit to him unconditionally. Still less can we make him the centre of a cult. To do so from our point of view would be nothing else than an intolerable deification of a human being." The comment at the end of "The Death in the Desert" puts a similar question, and answers, "Call Christ, then, the illimitable God, Or Lost!" But the final word which casts a light back upon the previous conclusion is "But, 'twas Cerinthus that is lost" — the man, in other words, who held the heresy that the Christ part only resided in Jesus, who was merely human, and that the divine part was not crucified, having flown away before. Thus it is implied that neither those who believe Jesus divine, nor those who believe him human, are lost, but those who try as Cerinthus did to make a compromise. The same note is struck in "Christmas Eve," and now Professor Eucken takes an exactly similar ground in regard to any sort of compromise, coming out boldly, however, as Browning does not in this poem, though he makes no strong argument against it — in

the acceptance of Christ as human. Browning's own attitude is expressed as clearly as it is anywhere in his work in the epilogue to "Dramatis Personæ," in which the conclusion is entirely in sympathy with that of Eucken:

"When you see what I tell you — nature dance
About each man of us, retire, advance,
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

"His worth, and — once the life, his product gained —
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,
And show thus real, a thing the North but feigned —

"When you acknowledge that one world could do
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,
Divide us, each from other, me from you —

"Why, where's the need of Temple, when the walls
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet calls?

"That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows."

The hold which the philosophy of Eucken seems to have taken upon the minds of many people all over the world shows that it must have great elements of strength. That there is a partial resemblance between his thought, which belongs to the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and Browning's is certain, but the

fact remains that the poet made a synthesis of the elements which must go to the forming of any complete religious conceptions of the future so far in advance of his own century that even Eucken is in some respects behind it.

Another interesting instance of Browning's presenting a line of reasoning which resembles very strongly one phase of present-day philosophy is to be found in "Bishop Blougram's Apology." The worldly Bishop gives voice to good pragmatic doctrine, which in a nutshell is, "believe in, or rather follow, that ideal which will be of the most use to you, and if it turns out not to be successful, then try another one." The poet declares that Blougram said good things but called them by wrong names. If the ideal is a high one there is no great danger in such reasoning, but it can very easily be turned into sophistical arguments for an ideal of living to thoroughly selfish ends, as Blougram actually did. The poem might almost be taken as a prophetic criticism of the weak aspects of pragmatism.

The belief in immortality which pervades Browning's work often comes out in a form suggesting the idea of reincarnation. His future for the human soul is not a heaven of bliss, but life in other worlds full of activity

and aspiration. This note is struck in "Paracelsus," where life's destiny is described to be the climbing of pleasure's heights forever the seeking of a flying point of bliss remote. In his last volume the idea is more fully brought out in "Rephan." In this it is held that a state of perfect bliss might grow monotonous, and that a preferable state would be to aspire, yet never attain, to the object aimed at. The transmigration is from "Rephan," where all was merged in a neutral Best to Earth, where the soul which had been stagnating would have an opportunity to strive, not rest. The most beautiful expression, however, of the idea of a future of many lives is found in "One Word More":

> "So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
> This of verse, alone, one life allows me;
> Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
> Other heights in other lives, God willing:
> All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!"

Though the theory of reincarnation is so ancient a one, and one entirely discredited by Christianity, Browning was again expressing an ideal which was to be revived in our own day. Oriental thought has made it almost a commonplace of talk. Many people doubtless speak of what they mean to do in their next incarnation without having the thought

very deeply imbedded in their consciousness, yet the mere fact that one hears the remark so often proves what a hold the theory has on the imagination of mankind. As Browning gives it in "One Word More," the successive incarnations take one on to higher heights — "other lives in other worlds." Thus regarded, it is the final outcome of evolution and progress, a process to be carried forward in other worlds than our own, and has no degrading suggestion of a degenerating, because of sin, into lower forms of existence. The movement is always upward. Thus it has been effected by the idea that progress is the law of life, and that evolution means, on the whole, progress.

Again, in the liberality of his social ideals, combined with an intensest belief in the supremacy of genuine love, he was the forerunner of Ibsen, who, the world is beginning to discover, was not a subverter of high moral ideals, as it had thought, but a prophet of the new day, when to be untrue to the highest ideal of love will be accounted the greatest crime of one human being against another. From "The Doll's House" to "When We That Are Dead Awaken" the same lesson is taught. Few people realize that this is the keynote of Browning's teaching, or would be

ready to regard him as a prophet of an ideal of love which shall come to be seen as the true one after the science of eugenics, the latest of the exact sciences, has found itself as powerless as all other sciences have been to touch the reality of life, because amid all the mysteries of the universe none is greater than the spiritual mystery of love. Among writers who are to-day recognizing a part of the truth, at least, is Ellen Key, but neither she nor Ibsen has insisted in the way that Browning has upon the mystical source of human love. That Browning is the poet who has given the world the utmost certainty of God, the soul and immortality, and the most inspiring ideals of human love, will be more completely recognized in the future. As time goes on he will emerge above the tumultuous intellectual life of the present, which, with its enormous increase of knowledge of phenomena, bringing with it a fairly titanic mastery of the forces of nature, and its generation of multitudes of ideas upon every conceivable subject, many of them trite, many of them puerile, and some of them no doubt of genuine value, obscures for the time being the greatness of any one voice. A little later, when the winnowing of ideas shall come, Browning will be recognized as one of the

greatest men of his own age or any age — a man combining knowledge, wisdom, aspiration, and vision to a marvelous degree. He belongs to the master-order of poets, who write some things which will pass into the popular knowledge of the day, but whose serious achievements will be read and studied by the cultured and scholarly of all time. No students of Greek literature will feel that they can omit from their reading his Greek poems, no students of sociology will feel that they can omit from their reading "The Ring and the Book." Lovers of the drama must ever respond to the beauty of "The Blot in the 'Scutcheon" and "Pippa Passes." Even the student of verse technique will not be able to leave Browning out of account, and making allowances for the fact that the individuality of his style sometimes overasserts itself, he will realize more and more its freshness and its vividness, its power of suggestion, and its depths of emotional fervor. When the romanticism of a Keats or a Shelley has completely worked itself out in musical efflorescence; from which all thought-content has disappeared, there may grow up a school of poets which shall, without direct imitation, develop poetry along the lines of vigor and strength in form, and which shall have for its

content a tremendous sense of the worth of humanity and an unshakable belief in the splendor of its destiny. *Virilists* might well be the name of this future school of poets who would hark back to Browning as their inspiration, and a most pleasant contrast would they be to the sentimental namby-pambyism which passes muster as poetry in much of the work of to-day.

In closing this volume which has been inspired by a deep sense of the abiding greatness of Robert Browning, it has been my desire to put on record in some way my personal indebtedness to his poetry as an inspiration not only to high thinking and living, but as a genuine revelation to me of the rare possibilities in poetic art, for I may almost say that Browning was my first poet, and through him, strange as it may seem, I came to an appreciation of all other poets. His poetry, fortunately for me an early influence in my life, awakened my, until then, dormant faculty for poetic appreciation. I owe him, therefore, a double debt of gratitude: Not only has he given me the joy of knowing his own great work, but through him I have entered the land of all poésie, led as I truly think by his sympathy with the scientific dispensation into which I was born. His

thought has always seemed so naturally akin to my own that it has never seemed to me obscure. Finding such thoughts expressed through the medium of great poetic genius, the beauty of poetic expression was brought home to me as it never had been before, and hence the poetic expression of all thought became a deep pleasure to me.

So much interpretation and criticism of Browning has been given to the world during the last twenty years, that further work in that direction seems hardly necessary for the present. There will for many a day to come be those who feel him to be among the greatest poets the world has seen, and those who find much more to blame in his work than to praise.

I have tried to give a few suggestions in regard to what Robert Browning actually was in relation to his time. The nineteenth century was so remarkable a one in the complexity of its growth, both in practical affairs and in intellectual developments, that it has been possible in the space of one volume to touch only upon the most important aspects under each division, and to try to show what measure of influence important movements had in the molding of the poet's genius.

Though in the nature of the case the treatment could not be exhaustive, I hope to

have opened out a sufficient number of pathways into the fascinating vistas of the nineteenth century in its relation to Browning to inspire others to make further excursions for themselves; and, above all, I hope I may have added at least one stone to the cairn which many, past and to come, are building to his fame.

THE END

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